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CULVERLEY RISE.

CHAPTER I.

When Mrs. Ballantine and her son reached Newland Hall, the former was so much fatigued by an exertion to which her strength was yet inadequate, that she felt unable to proceed, therefore Alfred went on alone the next day. It was well he did so, as he found everything at Culverley in the greatest confusion imaginable, for want of somebody to give directions whose authority would be acknowledged by the servants. The inquest had been held, and a verdict given that did

not criminate either of the deceased, consequently there were no difficulties in the way of the interment, and on him the melancholy task devolved of seeing the remains of his wretched, guilty cousins placed in the tomb. The funeral was performed with as much privacy as possible. The only persons who attended were himself, Dr. Phillips, Mr. Bolton, and an old farmer, who had been a tenant on the estate for upwards of forty years, and considered it as one of his prerogatives to assist at the funereal rites of any of the family.

All was so quietly conducted, that Lady Cray did not know when the ceremonial took place; neither was she told that Alfred was staying in the house; and so little did he assume upon his true position there, that no one would have supposed he was the real master of the place. The domestics, wholly ignorant of the laws of the land, fully believed that their lady was now sole mistress; the only one amongst them better

informed being Mrs. Wilson, the house-keeper, who, by Alfred's express desire, kept a guarded silence on the subject. In a letter to his mother, written the day after the funeral, he said—

"I think, my dearest mother, it will be advisable that you should come over as soon as you feel equal to the effort. I have not seen Lady Cray yet, nor does she know that I am here, as it is the opinion of Dr. Phillips that it had better not be mentioned to her. I cannot exactly understand why, but I suppose he has some good reason. To-morrow I intend to go to Preston for a day or two, as I want to talk over affairs with Bolton, who, it seems, has had a great deal to do with the management of the property, collecting the rents, and so forth. I do not like him, but cannot very well take the business out of his hands at present, and I suppose he may be kept tolerably honest if he is looked after. The doctor thinks that Lady Cray will recover. He asked me two or three very odd questions yesterday about

the Frenchman who is staying at Newland Hall. I could not exactly make out his drift, but there certainly was something beyond mere commonplace curiosity in his inquiries, which seemed chiefly directed towards getting all the information he could respecting Mr. Dupont's connection with the family, and he made some extraordinary allusions to Sir Lytleton's elder brother, who died abroad, which appeared to me to savour of some mystery. I asked him plainly what he meant; but he rather evaded the question, and all I could make out was, that he either knows, or suspects, that Lady Cray is afraid the Frenchman will betray some secret it does not suit her to have made known. I think you will agree with me, dear mother, that if this unhappy woman should recover, she must not have to seek a new home. For my own part, I have no wish whatever to disturb her so long as she desires to remain here. I am doubtful whether she knows that the right of dispossessing her is ours; if not, it will be an unpleasant surprise, but it may be softened

down by letting her understand that she will be treated as mistress of the place, provided she chooses to stay. Of course, I am supposing that you will take the same view of the case that I do; but I shall leave it to your discretion to make what propositions you please, and, at all events, they will come with a better grace from you than from me."

Before this missive came into the hand of Mrs. Ballantine, Mr. Dupont, who was still at Newland, had already related the particulars, as far as he could remember, of his acquaintance with the two brothers, Reginald and Lyttleton, during their sojourn at Munich. He spoke of Lyttleton's anxiety to obtain the information of his brother's marriage, and told without reserve of the part he had himself acted, being still under the impression made upon him at the time, that no harm was either done or intended. But General Keith shook his head with looks strongly expressive of doubt on that point.

"I cannot help thinking," he said, "that you entertained a far better opinion of Lyttleton Cray than he deserved. There was always some mystery, I believe, about the fate of that elder brother of his, whose marriage, it seems, was never mentioned here in England. There must have been some motive for keeping it so secret, and it could hardly have been a good one."

"I cannot tell," was Dupont's reply. "Mr. Lyttleton always did appear very amiable."

"Did he? Then I can only say that if such were his character as a young man, it had undergone a wonderful alteration by the time he reached forty, which was about his age, I think, when I first knew anything of him. But I forget that I am talking to both you and Mrs. Ballantine of a relation, and ought not to express my opinion quite so freely."

"Sir Lyttleton was no favourite of mine, as I believe you know perfectly well, General," replied Mrs. Ballantine; "yet I should

be sorry to judge him wrongfully. What his motive might be for speaking to us of his brother as having died unmarried, I cannot even conjecture, yet I am not willing to put an uncharitable construction upon it."

"I hope I am not uncharitable either, my dear lady; still, I must confess, that I do not think the eldest son of Sir Reginald Cray had fair play."

"Not fair play," repeated Mrs. Keith, with a slight shudder. "My dear love, that is a strange expression to use. Surely you cannot mean to say you suspect he was murdered?"

"Why no, my dear; I do not suppose he was poisoned, or anything of that sort. That would be a very terrible idea indeed. I do not mean to imply that his life was actually taken; but there are more ways of murdering a man than by killing him. You may murder all his hopes and prospects—his fame, his fortune, his peace of mind. You

may deprive him of all that gives worth to life, which is a more cruel mode of doing murder than taking the life itself."

"And do you believe that Sir Lyttleton Cray did all this?"

"Nay, my love, you are going on a little too fast now. I was only answering your proposition in a general point of view. God forbid that I should lay such sins at any man's door without sufficient testimony! Nevertheless, I must say I should like very much to know what really did become of the old baronet's eldest son."

"You have made me a great surprise," said Dupont. "Perhaps I did wrong to send intelligence of the marriage; but I believed he was quite in friendship with his brother, and that he only wanted to know that he might make some pleasantry."

"I am afraid he had a worse motive," observed the General. "I should think if there had been a child somebody would have come forward to make it known."

However, there is not much probability now that any light will be thrown on the matter. I must confess that my own impression is Lyttleton Cray did not come into the property by fair means."

"I have the intention to go to Munich in the autumn," said Dupont, "and shall then make much inquiry. All the world there did acquaint themselves very well with Mr. Riesberg—he was such a grand musician—and his daughter—Ah! she was very pretty. Never since have I seen a young lady so beautiful as Agnes Riesberg."

"Is that the reason you are still a single man, Monsieur Dupont?" said Mrs. Keith, laughing.

"No, madam; it is accident only that I am single. My uncle never would stay in one place so long as to give me opportunity to marry. We were sometime in India, sometime in America, sometime in Spain, sometime in Italy or Germany, as it should happen. Always flying here and there; east,

west, north, south ; how was it possible that I could get a wife ?”

This lively sally occasioned a great deal of laughter, the speaker himself heartily joining in the mirth he had excited ; from which manifestation it might be inferred that he was not particularly depressed by the sense of his forlorn condition.

He had become an immense favourite by this time at the Hall, for, independently of the service he had rendered the General, his manners were as pleasing, and his temper as frank and joyous, as in the days of his boyhood ; whilst the few cares and crosses he had met with in his journey through the world were borne so lightly that they were but as motes floating in a sunbeam. About two years since he had inherited a handsome fortune from the bachelor uncle by whom he was adopted in his infancy as a son, and he had, thereupon, given up mercantile pursuits for the enjoyments of a life free from any trammels whatever, and,

under these agreeable circumstances, he was now for the first time in England. Not having heard of Sir Lyttleton's death, his first object had been to find out, and renew his intimacy with, the Crays; but having failed in this, his purpose now was to take up his abode for a while in London, of which he had, as yet, seen but little.

In a few days Mrs. Ballantine was so completely renovated as to be able to proceed on her errand of charity, and Dupont escorted her part of the way; when they were met, according to a previous arrangement, by Alfred, to whom Camille gave up his charge, not choosing to go again to Culverley till he should receive an invitation from Lady Cray. When he had taken his leave, young Ballantine said to his mother—

“There is something about that fellow I like amazingly. He is the very man I should choose for my most intimate associate, and I sincerely hope he will stay in

England, that I may have an opportunity of cultivating his friendship."

Mrs. Ballantine could not repress a smile at the animated tone in which this was spoken, so characteristic of her son, in regard to his aptitude for receiving hasty impressions; but if this were a fault, it was one she could not reasonably condemn, since it arose from the warmth of heart that made him so infinitely dear to her; and, if it sometimes led him into imprudences, it was also productive of generous acts and noble sentiments.

She had declared more explicitly her intention of anticipating the course of nature by putting him at once in possession of the Culverley estate; as she had no desire to reside there herself, nor did she wish for an accession of property, that would rather add to her cares than her comforts.

Alfred had seen Mr. Bolton, and had examined Sir Reginald's will, by which he now learned for the first time that Reginald

Cray had been disinherited by his father on account of his marriage; but the wary lawyer did not mention the visit Reginald had paid him after the old man's death, nor give the slightest indication of his knowledge that the unfortunate young man had ever been in England afterwards.

Mrs. Ballantine, on coupling Alfred's discovery with Dupont's revelations, saw quite reason enough for the suspicions of General Keith, which she communicated to her son; but as all traces of the disinherited son appeared to be lost, they could only pity his fate and wish it had been otherwise.

"I think we ought to try to find out if there is a direct heir in existence," said Alfred, "for the will, under the present circumstances, would not affect his right. The eldest son was cut off from the succession; but, if I know anything of the law, his children, if he had any, would come in after the failure of the other branch."

"You are right," replied his mother. "We must endeavour to get some information on this point, for I think that neither you nor I, Alfred, would wish to usurp another's property. Mr. Dupont goes to Munich in the autumn——"

"I will go with him," said Alfred, with his usual impetuosity; "and between us both, it is hard if we don't find out something. At any rate, I shall never feel that I can look upon this place as my own, or take the title until I have ascertained beyond a doubt there is no one living who has a better claim than myself."

"True, my dear son; but as it is quite possible that no such claimant will ever appear, you are now, and most likely will continue to be, in the high position of a wealthy landed proprietor. Therefore it is advisable that you should begin to think about marrying, and——"

But he interrupted her impatiently. "Do not speak of it, mother. I have resolved

never to marry at all ; and no arguments will shake my determination."

"Which means, Alfred, that your mind is fixed on one particular object, and no other will content you."

"Perhaps so, mother. I know there are objections which, I suppose, must be held as insurmountable ; and so far I have made up my mind to sacrifice myself to the world's opinion, but further than that I will not go. Never will I take to my arms a woman who has not the first place in my heart, and it is useless to deceive myself or you. There is but one who ever can hold that place. And so let it rest."

Let it rest ! oh, no ! She had mentioned the subject purposely to learn what his feelings really were, as, from some chance words that had lately fallen from him, she had begun to suspect that his silence respecting Miriam did not arise either from indifference or forgetfulness, and that his peace of mind was far more seriously in-

volved than she had believed it to be ; in which case she thought it would be better to remove, if possible, the obstacles that stood in the way of his happiness, and had already devised a plan by which she hoped all conflicting circumstances might be reconciled ; but, before taking any steps towards carrying it into effect, she determined to satisfy herself as to the true state of Miriam's heart, and to decide accordingly.

CHAPTER II.

The reception Mrs. Ballantine met with from Lady Cray was so extremely ungracious that she only stayed two days, during which she felt that she was treated more like an unwelcome intruder, than one whose purpose was so friendly and benevolent. Her comforting words and kind attentions, instead of soothing, only served to irritate the unhappy woman whose troubles she would fain have alleviated; so that finding all attempts to console, and all offers

to befriend her, received with the same chilling air of repugnance, she abandoned the hopeless task, and returned again to Newland. Affliction generally tends to soften the hardest heart, and render it susceptible of kindness ; but it was not so with Lady Cray, who was, if possible, more repulsive than before, for she now regarded the Ballantines in the light of invaders about to seize upon her territories, and her enmity towards them was not lessened by Alfred's generous proposal that she should continue to reside there, her haughty spirit revolting against an obligation to which convenience impelled her to submit. Not a word of gratitude passed her lips ; and her unthankful assent was qualified by a stipulation that no one should intrude upon her solitude without an express invitation, a favour she secretly resolved should never be extended to those who so nobly left her in possession of the magnificent abode that was legally their own. Mrs. Ballantine

could scarcely refrain from showing the indignation she felt at this mode of treating a benefit of such vast magnitude; but Alfred persuaded her to take no notice of it, being, he said, as far at least as he was concerned, a matter of perfect indifference.

“In fact,” he added, “my motive in making this offer was a purely selfish one; for I thought it would be extremely unpleasant to have an apparition always haunting me, like a nightmare, of this miserable old woman wandering about the highways and byeways of the world after I had turned her out of her home.”

Leaving his mother at Newland, Alfred set off on a tour to the Highlands of Scotland, actuated partly by his love of romantic scenery, partly by prudential considerations, emanating from the news that Lady Wilsden was expected with her usual train.

Now, to court a danger that may be avoided is seldom a wise proceeding; and,

as Mrs. Ballantine had given no hint to her son of the scheme on which her mind was then engaged, with a view to the consummation of his happiness, he still acted on the assumption that her sentiments were unchanged.

So he started on his tour, not in very exuberant spirits, nor with that lively anticipation of enjoyment which we are apt to feel when on the point of visiting new scenes, but commenced his journey with the listless indifference of one pre-occupied with other thoughts. He might, perhaps, admire, but he was in no frame of mind to enjoy, the beauties even of a Scottish landscape; for, as the waters receive their colouring from the skies above, so do all objects around us appear bright or gloomy as the reflections of our own minds fall in light or shadow upon them.

Dupont was still at Newland. It had been his intention to leave on the very day that Lady Wilsden was expected; but

General Keith had positively insisted on his staying to be introduced to her ladyship, who, he declared, was in duty bound to acknowledge him as a cousin in a remote degree, since they were both connected with the Crays, then added, with extraordinary facetiousness for him who did not often indulge in such irregularities—

“And though you are but a distant relation, you must not be so far off that she cannot see you at all.”

It was late in the day when the visitors arrived, and, with her usual attention to formalities, Lady Wilsden went immediately to her room to change her attire, without even seeing her mother, who, on being told that her ladyship was dressing for dinner, said to herself—

“Alfred would have come to me first.”

Dupont was not particularly charmed with the stately lady, who, to use his own words, in giving his opinion to the General after the ladies had left the dining room,

“froze him up.” And, in answer to an observation that she was considered very handsome, he shrugged his shoulders with a dubious sort of “may be.”

In the meantime Miriam had been shown to the same apartment she had occupied before, and almost immediately received a polite message from Mrs. Keith, desiring to know whether she would prefer dinner or tea, and, as she chose the latter, it was sent up with the substantial accompaniments of chicken and ham, together with sweets of various kinds, to the great delight of the two little girls who were to partake of the meal.

But the attentive kindness of the amiable hostess was intended for Miriam, who began to feel that she was again amongst friends who looked upon her as something more than “the governess,” which, according to the too general acceptance of the term, signifies “a machine to teach children.”

The young folks, being tired with their

journey, soon went to bed, and Miriam was left to the uninterrupted indulgence of her own reflections.

It was scarcely twelve months since her father died, yet the time had passed so heavily in London that she could almost have fancied the months were years; but now that she found herself once more so near her former home, where every object recalled to mind the first days of her loss, all the circumstances rose up so vividly before her that the intermediate time became as nothing, and the one great sorrow of her life was, to her imagination, as recent as when she first came to that hospitable abode. Then she thought of the last evening she had spent there, and it seemed but as yesternight; did he ever think of it—and was he there now? For she did not know, and she had not courage to inquire.

As she stood at the window, gazing on the faint streaks of crimson that yet lingered in the skies, and lost in profound medi-

tation, the door behind her was softly opened, and somebody entered the room. She turned round, expecting to see one of the servants, but coloured with surprise and pleasure on perceiving that it was Mrs. Ballantine, whose visit was as gratifying as it was unlooked for. She was pale and thin from her late illness, but still beautiful, and the same elegant, queenlike creature as in earlier life, when, in her father's house, they styled her Queen Elinor. Miriam always beheld this lady with admiration, but she thought she had never seen her look so graceful or so benignant as at this moment.

"I am come, my dear Miss Bell," she said, "to thank you for the kind interest you took in my late illness. It was extremely gratifying to me, I assure you; and the children tell me you proposed being my nurse at night—was that so?"

Miriam replied that she should have been glad to be of service in any way; but was

truly happy to see that such assistance was no longer required.

"At present I am thankful to say it is not," said the lady, "but if I should ever be so ill again, I think I should be tempted to put your sincerity to the proof."

"You would find that I am sincere," replied Miriam, with so much earnestness that no one could for an instant have doubted her, and Mrs. Ballantine manifested her own belief in the truth of the assertion by affectionately kissing the cheek of the young girl, whose heart beat joyously at this mark of regard from one whose good opinion she so highly valued.

"Where are the children?" Mrs. Ballantine asked.

"They are gone to bed," said Miriam, "and I was glad to let them go, as they wished it, for they were very tired, and will, I dare say, be impatient to get up early in the morning; the gardens will be such a treat after the streets of London."

"Not only to them, I imagine," observed the lady, smiling.

"No, indeed ; I am quite as happy to be in the country again as they are, especially here, where every one is so kind to me."

"There are many reasons, I think, my love, that make this place agreeable to you, are there not?"

"Yes, madam, very many. It is near my former home ; it is near my father's grave, and it is near my friend and benefactor, Mr. Thornton, to whom I owe so many obligations."

"Ah ! yes. I think I have heard that it was he who attended your father. Had you known him before?"

"No, madam ; he was quite a stranger, and came to us entirely from the kindness of his own heart. Then he was a friend to me when I had not a friend in the world beside ; and it was he who first brought me here. I can never be grateful enough to him."

“I am glad you reckon the coming here amongst your causes of gratitude,” said the lady, “and I hope it will prove so. I have a great deal to say to you, my love, but not now. We will reserve a longer conference for a future opportunity, not very far distant, however; and, in the meantime, you may consider me as a friend anxious to promote your happiness as far as may be. Good night, my dear child; to-morrow I shall probably see you again.” And she left the room as quietly as she had entered, leaving Miriam confused, agitated, and utterly bewildered as to the purport of her last words.

Could it be possible that they had any reference to Alfred? But scarcely had the thought crossed her mind, when it was banished thence with something like a feeling of disdain; for, had he himself shewn any interest about her since his return? Had he not, on the contrary, slighted her, by omitting to pay even the attention that

common courtesy appeared to demand?
"Yet, what right have I, a poor governess, a dependent on his sister, to expect the same consideration from him as if I was his equal? I am afraid I have a great deal of foolish pride, and that I never shall feel as humble as I ought. If Mrs. Ballantine could know what I was thinking of just now, she would certainly despise me for my folly. Yet I wonder what she could mean by being anxious to promote my happiness; and what she can possibly have to say to me."

CHAPTER III.

Miriam arose at an early hour and threw open the window to inhale the fragrant breezes of the morning, and listen to the matins of the little winged choristers as they assembled together in their leafy temples to perform their instinctive worship of nature's God, by hailing the dawn of a new day with songs of gladness. She felt like one who has just been released from a long dreary imprisonment; and her heart was glowing with that delicious sense of

freedom inspired by a view of the open country after a long residence in a great metropolis, when the children came running into her room, laughing and joyous—for their spirits, like hers, were exhilarated by the pleasant change from dull red bricks and hard flag stones to the green trees, with their fresh spring leaves and blossoms, the opening flowers, and the soft verdant grass.

“Oh, Miss Bell ! see what a lovely morning it is. Only look at the beautiful lilacs, and the roses, and all the flowers at the other end of the lawn ; and it is so warm. Do pray come and take a walk before breakfast, will you ?”

“Very well,” said Miriam. “Ask nurse to put on your garden bonnets, and I will be ready in a minute.”

She did not often bestow much thought on the business of the toilet ; but on this particular occasion it might have been observed that she looked more than once in the glass, and took some trouble to arrange

her redundant golden tresses under her bonnet—and a very pretty bonnet it was, too, such as French fingers alone can produce; and she wore a very becoming dress of some light, flowing material, not black, but of such hues as are technically styled “half mourning.”

Still flushed with the excitement of the last night's interview with Mrs. Ballantine, and not a little agitated by the idea that it was possible Alfred might be staying at the Hall, she looked unusually animated, and so exceedingly beautiful, that even the children remarked it, and Mary said—

“How nice you look, Miss Bell! I wish Uncle Alfy was here—wouldn't he say you looked like an angel now?”

It was not in human nature to refrain from asking—

“Did you ever hear him say so, Mary?”

“Yes, I did once, to General Keith.”

“And so did I,” chimed in little Elinor, “and besides that, he said——”

Now Miriam certainly would have liked very much to hear what it was that he did say besides, but she felt there was a degree of indelicacy in taking advantage of the children's innocent prattle to learn what he had never intended she should hear.

Suppressing, therefore, the natural curiosity that would have tempted many to let the little chatterers tell all they knew, she hastily interrupted Elinor by saying—

“Hush, my dear. I do not wish to know what your uncle said, and you should remember how often I have told you never to repeat what you happen to overhear.”

Then, anxious to divert their thoughts to some other subject, she called their attention to a gorgeous butterfly that was fluttering amongst the flowers. Nothing is more easy than to change the current of a child's ideas.

“Oh! what a beauty!” they both exclaimed at once. “There it goes; let us run and see where he flies to.”

And away they went with great glee, chasing the brilliant insect from tree to tree and from flower to flower, every now and then shaking the leaves on which it rested for the pleasure of seeing it fly again, while Miriam followed more leisurely, reflecting on what she had just heard.

Thus they had been rambling about for nearly half an hour, when they were met by General Keith, who was now well enough to take his early morning walks.

He was accompanied by a gentleman Miriam had never seen before, and having spoken to the little girls, who were some way in advance, he approached with his accustomed friendly smile, held out his hand, and said—

“My dear Miss Bell, I am very glad to see you here again; and looking so well too. Why you are as blooming as if you had been a month in the country already.”

“It is owing to the pleasure I feel, sir, in coming back to this beautiful place. Allow

me to congratulate you on your recovery. I heard you had been very ill."

"Yes, I was very ill," he replied; "and if it had not been for the kind offices of this very excellent friend of mine, Mr. Dupont, I believe it would have been all over with me."

As he spoke, he turned towards Dupont, with intent to introduce the two to each other, but paused with a look of amazement, for the Frenchman was standing at a little distance, like one transfixed, gazing on Miriam with an expression of countenance in which surprise, perplexity, and intense interest, were strangely blended. She also had looked towards him, prepared to acknowledge the introduction, but seeing that his eyes were fixed upon her with an earnestness that, in a stranger, might well be accounted rudeness, she drew back, and colouring with confusion, in which something of displeasure was apparent, curtsied slightly to him, wished the General 'good morning,' and passed on.

The moment she had disappeared, Dupont seized the General's arm and said, in an agitated voice—

“General Keith, I pray you to tell me, who is that young lady?”

“A very charming girl, I assure you,” replied the old gentleman, laughing; for, as Dupont was a single man, he misinterpreted the motive of his eager inquiry, supposing it had its origin in the unexpected sight of so lovely a person.

“Yes, yes—she is charming, I perceive; but who is she? what is her name? You do not tell me that,” the querist continued, in a still more excited manner.

“Her name is Bell—Miriam Bell; and she is governess to Lady Wilsden's little girls. She came first to her ladyship when she was staying here last summer, and was recommended by Thornton the doctor, who knew something of her father, I believe.”

“Bell?” repeated Dupont, in a tone of disappointment. “Ah! then it cannot be—

and yet she is so like. But you say Mr. Thornton had acquaintance with her father. Is he living?"

"No, he died last year, just before she came to us. She is in mourning for him still."

"Has she a mother?"

"I think not—in fact, I know she has not, for Thornton said she was an orphan."

"And her father—what was he? Where did he reside?"

"At Liverpool, I believe. He was a clerk, as I have been given to understand, in a merchant's counting house there, but he lost his sight, and, of course, his situation, so that he was reduced to extreme poverty, and this poor thing was left quite destitute. Thornton, however, who is as worthy a fellow as ever breathed, took a great deal of interest in her concerns; for, it seems, he attended the father as a matter of charity, for this young lady had no means of paying him, and when the poor

man died, he came to my wife to ask her to recommend Miss Bell to Lady Wilsden, who wanted a governess for the children. And now, my good friend, it is your turn to tell me what it is that makes you so anxious to know all these particulars."

"Because I would almost swear that if Agnes Riesberg did ever make to be born a daughter, it is that young lady."

It was now the General's turn to look surprised. He was indeed startled by this asseveration, which, if it could be substantiated, might throw a light on many circumstances that were now obscured by the clouds of mystery; and, feeling deeply interested, he asked Dupont what ground he had for speaking so positively, to which he answered—

"I have never seen so great resemblance! it is wonderful! I should believe it is Mademoiselle Agnes herself, but that she would now be many years older."

1 "This is a most extraordinary conjecture,

Dupont," said the General, after a few moments' reflection; "but there seems to be some probability in it. Her mother, I have been told, was a native of Germany, and she herself speaks the German language perfectly."

"Hah! That is almost proof. Then, her father—if I should be right—would be Mr. Reginald Cray."

"Certainly it would be so, the very man whose fate I have been so desirous to learn. Bless my soul! this would be a most important discovery; there is no telling what consequences it might lead to."

"Poor Mr. Reginald!" said Dupont, in accents of heartfelt sorrow, "it would grieve me much to find he should die in want. You will not delay to make inquiry, General?" he added, anxiously. "I shall not have peace one moment till we shall know the truth."

"I will see into it at once, my dear sir. By the way, Thornton will be here this

morning, and may be able to assist us materially. The more I think of it the greater seems the possibility of its turning out to be as you surmise. But I think it will be as well to say nothing at all about it till we have had some talk with Thornton; for, you see, the Ballantines are deeply concerned. At present, they are heirs to the estate."

"And if this young lady should prove to be the daughter of Mr. Reginald?"

"In that case, I believe she would be the sole heiress."

General Keith knew, in fact, that it was so, as Alfred had made him acquainted with the purport of old Sir Reginald's will; but he did not tell this to Dupont, knowing how painful it would be to him to hear that Reginald Cray had been disinherited on account of his marriage, which would, perhaps, never have been known but for the information he had given in his last letter to Lyttleton Cray. He therefore said

nothing about it, but awaited with almost as much impatience as the Frenchman himself the coming of the doctor, which they both hoped would tend to throw a light on a history that had so long been shrouded in darkness.

Unconscious that her future destiny was in the hands of the stranger, whose imaginary want of good breeding had so much discomposed her, Miriam soon dismissed that seemingly trifling incident altogether from her thoughts, and had just commenced with her pupils the lessons of the day, when a servant brought in a sealed note, which he handed to her on a silver tray, with a more deferential air than usual, and instantly left the room. It was the first time she had received any written communication since her father's death, and her hand trembled as she opened it, half in dread of some misfortune, though of what nature she could not surmise; nor were her fears allayed on reading these words—

"General Keith requests the honour of a few minutes' conversation with Miss Bell in the library."

What could be the occasion of a summons so extraordinary? It was utterly impossible to form any idea, therefore she prepared to obey, with a nervous trepidation she had seldom or never before experienced, feeling that it could be no ordinary circumstance which had induced the General to desire a private conference, especially during the school hours, which, according to Lady Wilsden's regulations, were never, on any account, to be infringed upon.

She had fully expected to find him alone, but, on entering the library, she saw not only the stranger who was with him in the morning, but her old friend, Mr. Thornton, whose pleasant smile and cordial salutation at once reassured her, and she now concluded that it was at his desire she had been sent for.

In the great pleasure she felt at meeting

him again, she forgot for an instant that it was necessary to take some notice of the General's message, but recollecting this almost immediately, she turned towards him, saying—

“You wished to see me, sir?”

“Yea, Miss Bell; I beg you will be seated. We have a few questions to ask you, which are of importance to us all, but more particularly to yourself. Don't be alarmed; we are not going to put you upon your trial for manslaughter, though I would not take upon myself to say that you have not been guilty of something of the kind.”

“Not voluntarily, General, I assure you,” she replied, laughing, for his good humour quite relieved her from the apprehension that anything unpleasant had occurred. Still she was at a loss to imagine what this stranger could have to do with her or her affairs, and that he was concerned in some way seemed clear, for even now, while her eyes were studiously turned away from him,

she felt sure that his were fixed on her with the same intent observation as before.

At length, the General commenced the examination by asking—

“Do you know, my dear Miss Bell, whether you ever had any relations named Riesberg?”

“Certainly, sir, I had ; Riesberg was the name of my grandfather, and of my mother before she was married.”

“Then I am right !” exclaimed Dupont, starting up, and rubbing his hands with delight ; “I was sure it must be so. Mademoiselle is the daughter of Agnes Riesberg.”

“Agnes was the name of my mother,” said Miriam, no longer seeking to avoid his earnest gaze, which she could now account for ; “did you know her, sir ?”

“Yes, indeed, I knew her perfectly well. I was at Munich when she was married to Mr. Reginald Cray. It is long ago. I was a boy in that time, but I was great friends

with Mademoiselle Riesberg, and with Mr. Reginald also."

"But you must be mistaken, sir, answered Miriam, her momentary gladness subsiding into disappointment—"the Mademoiselle Riesberg you speak of could not have been my mother."

"Why not?" said General Keith—"it appears to me there can be little doubt about it, for I have certainly heard, from Mr. Ballantine, I think, that your mother was a native of Germany, and that your father was married in that country."

"Yes, sir; all that is true; but the name of my father was George Bell."

"Are you quite sure that was his real name, my love?"

The question startled her; it was the first time such a doubt had ever entered her mind, but it was like a sudden ray of light, making clear all that had been dark and inexplicable as regarded her father's early

history. With varying colour and faltering voice, she addressed Dupont—

“You spoke of the gentleman you suppose to have been my father; I think you called him Mr. Reginald Cray. Was that gentleman related to Sir Lyttleton Cray, of Culverley Rise?”

“He was his brother.”

A murmured ejaculation fell from Miriam'st rembling lips. This would, indeed, account for her father's deep emotion at the name of Sir Lyttleton, when she read of his dangerous illness, for if, indeed, they were so related, it was natural he should have been thus moved.

“I believe—I am almost certain,” she said, as soon as she could regain sufficient command over herself to speak with any degree of composure—“there was some secret connected with Sir Lyttleton Cray that my father withheld from me. I had no suspicion of it; I never even heard the name till within a few weeks of my dear

father's death, when it was casually mentioned in a newspaper, and I own I was greatly surprised at the effect it produced upon him, but I did not know the cause. He never mentioned it afterwards."

"Will it be distressing to you, my dear," the General asked, "to describe, as nearly as you can remember, what that effect was?"

"He was so much agitated that I thought he was seized with a sudden faintness, for I had no idea, at the moment, it had anything to do with what I was reading; nor should I have suspected it at all but for the eagerness with which he made me read the paragraph over again, and then I saw that the tears were running down his cheeks, though he tried to hide them from me."

"What was the nature of the paragraph," said the General.

"It was that Sir Lyttleton Cray was lying dangerously ill at Culverley Rise, and not expected to recover. There was some-

thing about an election too, but I forget what that was. I only wondered why he should seem so interested about a person I had never heard of."

"Did you never ask him anything about it?"

"No, sir; he was so ill, even then, that I was afraid of saying anything that would cause him the slightest agitation, and he gradually became worse from that time, so that I forgot the circumstance myself, and never thought of it again till I heard last summer that we were going to Culverley Rise."

"This is a very strong point," said General Keith, addressing himself to the other gentlemen; "but it is not proof. We must have more conclusive evidence still; and the difficulty is, how to obtain it."

"I think I have it," said the doctor; "there is one way of settling the question so as to leave no doubt whatever about it.

Where is that picture you once showed me, young lady?"

"The portrait, sir? I have it here with me. I will fetch it in a moment."

She left the room, and, returning in a few minutes, gave the morocco case, containing the miniature likeness of her father, into the hand of Dupont, who, the instant he cast his eyes upon it, said, while every feature was lighted up with animation—

"This is Mr. Reginald Cray!"

"In that case," said the General, rising, and taking the hand of the agitated, bewildered Miriam, "I believe we must congratulate this young lady as being the sole heiress of her late uncle, Sir Lyttleton Cray, and the lawful owner of Culverley Rise."

CHAPTER IV.

In the meantime Alfred Ballantine was pursuing his Scottish tour in the most discontented frame of mind imaginable, admiring nothing, enjoying nothing ; yet wanting resolution to break through the trammels that fettered his conduct, and smothered the warm impulses of his heart.

He had spent some days in Edinburgh, visiting all those places to which history has given a lasting interest, but, if the truth must be owned, not caring half so much

about such historical associations as any schoolboy would have done, but feeling rather bored than otherwise by the recital of the tragic scenes that had been enacted at Holyrood, or the exciting adventures that have immortalized the Tolbooth.

Still it was necessary for a traveller to see the lions of the place, so he went through the ceremony with that listless indifference which bespeaks a mind pre-occupied with matter more interesting, and was on the point of starting for Glasgow on his way to the Highlands, when all his plans were disconcerted, and his ideas thrown into a state of unutterable confusion by the astounding intelligence conveyed in a letter from his mother, of the extraordinary discoveries respecting the heiress of Culverley, which had just been made through the medium of the Frenchman, Camille Dupont.

His first impression was of joy—joy, almost amounting to ecstasy, for every ob-

stacle seemed to be now removed that had interposed itself between him and his dearest wishes ; but then came the counteracting influence of reflections less satisfactory. *Was* every obstacle removed ? Had he not himself created difficulties that it would be impossible to surmount ? Had he not neglected Miriam entirely since that memorable evening at Newland Hall, when he had so nearly avowed the sentiments of his heart. Oh ! how sincerely did he wish he had then spoken the words that were upon his lips, for what would she think of such a declaration now ? Would she not suppose it emanated from the most contemptible of motives ? It was hardly possible that she could give him credit for disinterestedness in a love he had left untold till circumstances made it his interest to declare it.

Then came the tormenting vision of the many lovers that would now be sighing at her feet. Yes ; even if he found courage to make his pretensions known, he would have

a host of rivals to compete with ; and what had he done to give him any better claim to her favour than the most selfish and despicable of fortune hunters among them ? Nothing.

No, he could not offer himself now ; the thing was impossible. She was lost to him for ever, and all through his own folly in being guided by the dictates of pride and prejudice, instead of listening to the promptings of his own heart.

Mrs. Ballantine's letter was so carefully worded that he could not gain from it the slightest clue either to Miriam's feelings or her own.

The facts were simply stated, without a word in reference to the change as it affected him with regard to the destination of the property.

She did not say how Miriam bore her altered fortunes ; she did not speak of his attachment as being now unobjectionable, or allude to it in any way whatever.

It was, he thought, rather a dry, matter-of-fact letter, considering the overpowering interest of the subject of which it treated.

There was one part of it, however, that did give him pleasure. It was the last paragraph, and it ran thus:—

“I think, dear Alfred, you must give up for the present your intended excursion to the Highlands, as there is much to be done in order to substantiate this young lady's claim, and establish her identity as the granddaughter of Sir Reginald Cray. I do not for an instant question your readiness to afford all the assistance in your power ; therefore, I feel sure you will not hesitate to return at once to Newland Hall, for the sooner the affair is put in a right train the better, and this is General Keith's opinion, as well as my own. Still, if it should be very inconvenient to you to come immediately, a few days cannot make any very material difference. Therefore, you must be guided by your own engagements ; but, at any rate, I shall expect to see you sooner than I

had hoped, and this, you are quite aware, my beloved son, is a source of sincere pleasure to your affectionate mother, Elinor Ballantine.

Alfred read this concluding portion of the missive several times. He did not exactly see how he could render any very important assistance in proving the identity, or establishing the rights, of Sir Reginald Cray's granddaughter; still, he was impatient to show Miriam how readily he could surrender to her the property he had so lately acquired, and how infinitely dearer to him was her interest than his own.

"Yes," he said, "she shall at least know that I am unselfish in that. She may believe me to be a vain trifler; she may despise me as a conceited coxcomb, who was playing on her credulity for his own amusement; but she shall be obliged to acknowledge that I have no mercenary ideas—that I pay no more homage to her wealth than I did to her poverty."

With these heroic reflections, he packed

up his things with such extraordinary haste, that, had it not been for the attentive care of his hostess, nearly half of them would have been left behind him; and owing to these laudable exertions, he was enabled to leave Edinburgh by the very next train that started for the south after the receipt of his mother's letter.

Leaving him to enjoy his journey as he might, we will return to the library at Newland Hall.

It was some time before Miriam could realise the truth of what she had heard, so strange, so almost impossible, did such a change in her destiny appear to be; and to the compliments of Dupont, as well as the friendly congratulations of Mr. Thornton, she made such incoherent replies, that it was evident other thoughts and feelings were mingling with those caused by her own sudden elevation from the rank of a poor dependent to that of a wealthy heiress.

As soon as Dupont had declared his con-

viction that the portrait she had shown him was that of Reginald Cray, the General went in search of Mrs. Ballantine, as being the person most interested in the discovery.

All was soon explained to her, and so far from exhibiting any signs of mortification or disappointment, she embraced Miriam with all the warmth of an affectionate mother, and expressed, both by words and looks, such sincere pleasure at the bright prospect before her, that no one would have imagined she was congratulating a rival claimant on the success that would deprive herself of a splendid property.

Mr. Thornton was evidently astonished and overwhelmed with admiration at an instance of disinterestedness such as had never before come under his observation; but the General, who was shrewd enough to discern the merits of the case, afterwards afforded the worthy doctor some enlightenment on the subject, by saying—

"Young Ballantine will not lose the estate, I rather think. It will come to him through another channel, that's all."

"Oh! does the wind sit in that quarter?" responded the doctor. "I had a little suspicion myself last summer, when the young gentleman came to my house with a got-up case of bilious headache, to pump out of me all I knew about Miss Bell; but under the circumstances then, I thought it best to be cautious, so I told him nothing. However, I shall be heartily glad if he succeeds, for I believe he is a fine young fellow, and his mother is as charming a woman as ever I saw."

CHAPTER V.

On the breaking up of the conclave in the library, Miriam followed Mrs. Ballantine to her apartment, and, as soon as they were alone together, gave way to the feelings she had with great difficulty controlled before so many witnesses. Throwing herself into the extended arms of the gentle lady, who now seemed to her like some new found treasure, she suffered her tears to flow without restraint, tears as bright as the sun gilded shower that falls from

some light vapour floating along the summer sky.

"Miriam," said Mrs. Ballantine softly, "you must henceforth learn to love me as a mother, for you have none so near to you now in the world as I am. Your father was my uncle's son, and his child shall be my own dearest daughter."

"Oh! madam, I can never be grateful enough for all the kindness you have shown me. I will love you, I do love you, more than I can express. But I can hardly believe all this is real; it is so wonderful, so like a dream."

"It is indeed like a dream; and you have reason to thank the Providence that sent this foreigner amongst us; for without him the truth would most likely never have been known. And now, Miriam, do you remember what I said to you last night; and can you, amid the excitement of all these happy circumstances, give any atten-

tion to the communication I told you I had to make ?”

“Yes, dear lady,” she replied, blushing deeply ; “no circumstances on earth would make me inattentive to anything you have to say to me.”

“Then, love, we will suppose that no change has taken place ; we will suppose that we are to each other the same as we were yesterday ; and you must trust me, Miriam, so far as to believe that I will not give utterance to a single word now, that it was not then my intention to say. Can you place so much confidence in me ?”

“I can—I do ; I have every confidence in you, for I know you would say nothing but what is good and true.”

“I am afraid you give me more credit than I deserve,” Mrs. Ballantine replied, with a smile ; “however, when I told you last night that I had much to say to you, I meant to speak of my son.”

"What of him?" asked Miriam, in a faint and trembling voice.

"He loves you, Miriam—he has long loved you; and I had resolved to tell you so before I knew anything of this change in your fortune. It is necessary for my sake as well as for his that you should believe this, so that neither he nor I may be open to the suspicion of interested motives; therefore, before I proceed, I must be assured that you do believe it."

Miriam was so much agitated by this most unexpected disclosure, that she could scarcely command voice enough to murmur—

"I do believe it."

Mrs. Ballantine then went on—

"I have known of his attachment for some time, but I discouraged it, for I foresaw that it might be the cause of much unhappiness to you both. I pointed out to him the evils that are likely to arise from unequal marriages—in short I dissuaded

him from endeavouring to raise an interest in your heart, and he listened to my advice, for he saw that my reasons were well founded. But he was unhappy, and left Culverley without seeing you, because he could not trust his own resolution."

She paused, but Miriam said not a word. She was far too happy to speak; her heart beat tumultuously, her cheeks flushed, and her downcast eyes were beaming with joyful emotions. All these tokens satisfied Mrs. Ballantine that her feelings towards Alfred were not those of indifference, and she thus continued—

"Since he returned to England, on account of my illness, I have observed how restless and discontented he has been; but I still hoped the impression would, in time, wear away, and I was anxious it should be so, to prevent any breach between him and his sister. It is only a week since I discovered how deeply his happiness is really concerned; and since then I have been

meditating upon a plan that I was going to propose to you this very day, if I found that you had as much regard for him as I believe he merits."

Miriam lifted up her eyes for an instant, and they were so full of love—happy, truthful, confiding love—that words were needless to assure the mother that the merits of her beloved son were fully appreciated, and had won all the regard due to them.

"It would be useless now," she said, "to enter into all the details of my project, but its object, dear Miriam, was to make you my daughter-in-law without letting the world know that Alfred Ballantine's wife had been Lady Wilsden's governess. I intended to send you to France for a while, then to introduce you as the orphan daughter of a friend, well born and well endowed; but it matters not how this scheme was to be carried out, since it is rendered abortive by the disclosures that

have been made this day. And now—
What am I to say to my son?”

“Say what you please,” answered the blushing, happy girl; “you shall decide for me.”

“My own dear child,” said the lady, again embracing her, “this candour is worthy of you. It confirms all my previous good opinions, and it will be the greatest happiness I can now enjoy to see my noble boy united to one so deserving, in every way, of his affection, without fear of the ills I dreaded.”

She had meant to tell him all this in her letter; but upon further consideration she determined to leave it to himself to find out Miriam’s sentiments his own way, wisely concluding that this would be a more interesting mode of proceeding to them both than to come to an understanding through the medium of a third person; and thus it happened that her letter was so unsatisfactory to the self-accusing lover.

Mrs. Keith listened to her husband's account of Miriam's sudden elevation with as much delight as a child reads a new fairy tale ; but Lady Wilsden received the tidings with little demonstration of any kind, although a nice observer might have detected a slight curl of the lip, which seemed to indicate a distaste for the affinity she was called upon to acknowledge.

Too well bred, however, to make any such feeling apparent, either by word or gesture, she offered her hand to her newly-found cousin, and gave utterance to some commonplace phrases of a congratulatory nature ; but there was more of politeness than cordiality in them, and Miriam felt it a great relief when, having formally released her from all charge of the children, she took her departure with them from the Hall, on the plea that Lord Wilsden did not like being in town without her. She was in truth, greatly surprised at her mother's indifference to the loss sustained

by Alfred in consequence of the discovery of Miriam's parentage, for she had not the slightest suspicion of her brother's attachment, nor did Mrs. Ballantine think it advisable to enlighten her just at present, wisely allowing time for her mind to become familiar with the altered position of her late dependant ere she was forced upon her notice as one who might soon claim to be looked upon as a sister.

The statements made by Dupont, together with the disinheriting clause in the will of old Sir Reginald, which had been read by Alfred Ballantine, sufficiently elucidated the unhappy history of Reginald Cray; and great was the sorrow, bitter the self-upbraidings of the kind-hearted Frenchman on finding that he had himself been instrumental to the downfall of that unfortunate young man.

He almost worshipped Miriam, as, if, by his devotion to her, he desired to make

some atonement for the injury he had so unintentionally caused ; and she was naturally delighted to talk of her father to one who had known him at that period of his life over which he had flung a veil of mystery that was now uplifted to her for the first time, revealing a picture more interesting than she had ever imagined in her most romantic dreamings.

How fondly she hung upon every little incident he told of Reginald's clandestine love ! How eagerly she listened to the relation of his secret marriage ! She now learned, too, how sumptuously he had lived in those days, and no longer wondered at his habitual melancholy. In one of these conversations, Miriam said—

“Do you think your aunt knew of Sir Lyttleton's wicked conduct ?”

“I should have much fear that it was so,” he replied ; “and perhaps that is why she will not see me.”

"It is strange," said Miriam, thoughtfully, "but the only time I ever saw Lady Cray I felt a cold shudder as if some evil spirit had crossed my path. I could not account for it then, but it is possible this may explain it."

"Ah! I perceive you have some thoughts like Mr. Ballantine—some ideas preternatural. He believes that dreams come to tell what will have place. A very pleasant young gentleman, Mr. Ballantine. Do you know him?"

The colour rushed to Miriam's face, and she answered so confusedly that Dupont paused for an instant and looked intently at her, then walked on by her side in silence for a longer time than he was in the habit of doing. He did not then mention Alfred to her again, but in the evening he asked General Keith if he thought there was a great friendship between Mr. Ballantine and Miss Cray.

"Ah! my dear friend," said the General,

"I have been intending, for several days past, to give you a word of caution. There is so much friendship between them, that the less you think about Miss Cray the better."

CHAPTER VI.

Mrs. Ballantine had reckoned pretty accurately in her own mind the exact hour at which Alfred would make his appearance at Newland Hall, allowing the smallest possible space of time for the performance of the journey after her missive should have reached him ; and being resolved to let him plead his own cause, without giving him the slightest previous intimation that it was already decided in his favour, she took care, by some kind of manœuvring that all ladies

understand, that he should find Miriam alone.

He had been engaged during the tedious hours it had taken to accomplish the distance by the express train, which seemed to him the slowest train he had ever travelled by in his life, in proving to himself that he was undoubtedly the most unfortunate as well as the most miserable of men, and had made up his mind that the only advisable thing left for him to do, was to turn hermit, and wear out the remainder of his wretched existence upon vegetable diet in some lonely cell, far from the haunts of womankind.

Miriam did not know he was expected, and as he came in through the shrubbery, and walked up to the house by a side path instead of crossing the front lawn, she did not see him, and was quite unconscious of his approach.

She was seated at the piano, singing one of the German songs her father was so fond of, and the rich tones of her voice, so well

calculated to give the true expression to those highly wrought melodies, arrested the footsteps of the enchanted listener who had never heard her sing before. He stood at the half-open door of the drawing room like one spell bound, and when the song was concluded he stood there still, without courage to enter, for he saw that she was alone in the apartment and was very doubtful what sort of a reception he might meet with.

He could perceive that she looked radiant and happy, and he looked upon this as a piece of cruelty, inasmuch as it denoted a sort of triumphing over him that he was ill disposed to endure. Besides, what right had she to be happy when he was so miserable? She cared nothing about him, that was clear—he had a great mind to go away again without speaking to her at all—but instead of acting in accordance with this valiant sentiment, he pushed open the door with something like an effort of desperation, and went in.

She instantly rose from the instrument, and he saw at once that her manner towards him was entirely changed. There was a strange mixture of reserve and embarrassment very different from her usual graceful ease; her salutation appeared to him cold and formal; her eyes that used to beam with pleasure whenever he approached her, were now bent to the ground, and the vivid colour that overspread her face and neck he attributed, in his ignorance of all that had passed, to the unpropitious influence of pride and resentment.

Miriam's confusion arose, in fact, from the circumstance that she did not know how far he was informed on the subject of her sentiments in his favour; for, although aware that his mother had written to him, she did not know how much or how little that lady had revealed; consequently this sudden meeting, so unlooked for at the moment, was naturally an embarrassing one to her, and it was perhaps, equally natural, that he should put a

false construction on signs and tokens so equivocal.

Never had he felt so utterly confused; never so entirely lost his self-possession. Not a single word of all he had intended to say could he now remember; but, after a most awkward interval of silence, he at length stammered out a few almost incoherent words about "the honour" and "the pleasure" which she did not exactly comprehend, but taking it for granted they were intended to be complimentary, and were spoken in allusion to the improved state of her affairs, she replied.

"I ought to be especially grateful to you, Mr. Ballantine, for any kind wishes you may please to express, since the good that has befallen me is so greatly to your disadvantage."

A suppressed smile lurked on her ruby lips as she gave utterance to this somewhat disingenuous speech; but he was too obstinately bent on considering himself the most

ill-fated of mortals, to notice the auspicious omen, and answered, in a desponding tone.

"It is indeed, but not in the sense you would imply. No, Miss Cray, do not imagine for a moment that I feel any regret in giving up that to which I had no just title; most gladly, most joyfully do I resign it. The cause I have for sorrow is in all I have lost beside."

"Have you met with any losses?" said Miriam, really misunderstanding him. "I have not heard of them."

"No, Miss Cray; nor will you ever hear of them from me, for I cannot, must not, dare to tell you."

"Why not, Mr. Ballantine? Do you suppose that I should not be grieved at any evil that had happened to you? Do you think I should not feel interested about your losses?"

"Oh, that I could believe you would! But they are not pecuniary losses. If they were, I should bear them with indifference."

"As you do the loss of Culverley."


"As I do the loss of Culverley, if that can be called a loss, which was never a possession. But the esteem I once, presumptuously perhaps, flattered myself I did possess—I cannot lose that, and not regret it."

"Whose esteem have you lost, Mr. Balantine?" she asked, beginning now to have some perception of his meaning.

"Nay, Miriam, you can have no need to ask me that."

She was seated on a sofa, and he had thrown himself into an arm chair at a little distance from it; but there was something in her voice and look, as she asked the last question, that gave him courage to venture nearer, and sit down by her side.

He began to think his case might not be so desperate after all, as he had apprehended; the hermit scheme looked far less promising than it did half an hour before; and, in short, his fears and scruples were



gradually melting into air; he drew still nearer and nearer, and as she made no movement in order to put a wider space between them, he took her hand and said—

“Miriam, beloved Miriam, can you forgive my past seeming neglect? Can you believe it did not arise from indifference, and that when I tore myself away from your presence the world was like a dreary wilderness to me—that I cared for nothing, thought of nothing, but the happy moments I had spent with you?”

“You call upon me to believe a great deal,” Miriam replied, rather archly, but her hand was not withdrawn, nor her face turned away from him—she did not understand coquetry, she had seen too little of the world for that. She knew he spoke the truth, and made no pretence of disbelieving him. He continued—

“I know you must think me very presumptuous to expect so much; but if I could prove to you by other testimony than

my own, that when I left you at Culverley I was even then ready to give up all the world for your sake. Would you believe me then, Miriam?"

"I cannot promise to receive all this as the exact truth," she replied, "but Mrs. Ballantine has told me much that I can and do believe."

"My mother! Has she been my advocate? Has she told you all that I confided to her?"

"We have had some conversation," answered Miriam, blushing and hesitating. "Your mother has been exceedingly kind to me, not only now, but before Mr. Dupont had made us acquainted with my dear father's history. I can never repay her for all the goodness she has shown me."

"She will be satisfied, dearest, to be repaid by your goodness to me. And now, my adored Miriam, am I forgiven? May I hope to be restored to that place in your

regard you once allowed me to believe I held?"

What answer she made to this appeal must be left to the imagination of the reader, who is at liberty to put it into any form most agreeable to the ideas of propriety he or she may entertain, some inclining to the sentimental, others to the matter of fact; it is enough for us to say that, after the lapse of about an hour, Miriam reminded her lover that it was high time for him to think of paying his respects to his mother, and, that he might not delay so doing, she withdrew to her own apartment, to enjoy the luxury of thinking, in solitude, how very, very happy she was.

Immediately after she had left the room, General Keith entered it, with a peculiar smile of intelligence on his countenance, which might have led to the inference that he had been watching for the breaking up of the *tête-a-tête*.

"Well, Ballantine, I was told you were

here, and hastened to condole with you on this unlooked for transfer of property. But, how is it? You don't look very much like a man standing in need of consolation—you seem to bear it with tolerable philosophy.”

“My dear General—give me joy! I am the happiest fellow in the world!”

“Oh! that's it, is it? Well then, I do give you joy, with all my heart. I shall not put my foot in it this time, as I did once before; and I hope you bear no enmity towards me on that score.”

Alfred laughed, and shook hands heartily with the friendly old gentleman, whom he truly respected, saying gaily—

“Why, as it has all turned out well, I can afford to be friends with you; but had it chanced otherwise, I should have been tempted to desire your company some fine morning, sword in hand, at six o'clock, behind the gooseberry bushes there.”

“Ah, I'm a little too old for that sort of work now. That's a fine fellow, that

Frenchman. What a providential thing it was, his happening to come amongst us just at this time, when the fate of those two unfortunate young men threw the succession open. It is an extraordinary chain of circumstances, Ballantine. The more I think of it, the more I am inclined to believe that chance has very little to do with these things."

"I am rather disposed to be of that opinion myself, General; and, talking of Dupont, we must try to keep him amongst us, for he's a friend worth having. But what we are to do with the old lady I don't know."

"What, Lady Cray? I have been thinking of that myself; for though it was all very well for you to give up the place to her, I do not think it would be at all justifiable to withhold immediate possession from this young lady. She ought to take her proper station at once as mistress of her own home, for I cannot help thinking those

who have held it so long, were, in a moral sense, the usurpers of her father's rights, although they had the law on their side. Poor fellow! It was a sad life he was condemned to lead. What a pity he did not live to witness this happy change; yet, if this link had been wanting in the chain, it might, perhaps, never have reached the same end."

CHAPTER VII.

The first step to be taken with regard to Lady Cray was to apprise her of the unforeseen events that had transpired, an unpleasant task which no one seemed disposed to undertake, yet as it was necessary it should be done without delay a long consultation was held on the subject, when it was decided that Mr. Bolton was the fittest person to convey the intelligence, as being wholly uninterested in the personality of the actual proprietor.

Still it was necessary that he, as the acting man of business, should be put in possession of all the facts relating to the new claimant; therefore Alfred and Dupont agreed to go together to the old man's house at Preston, for he still inhabited the same domicile where Reginald had visited him thirty years ago, it being one of those happy pieces of domestic architecture that had stood its ground in spite of railway innovation.

Nothing was very materially changed in the aspect of the lawyer's abode, except the age of its inmates. Mr. Bolton was still a little fussy man, with as keen an eye to the main chance as in days of yore; but time had decorated his countenance with innumerable wrinkles, and had carried away in exchange all his teeth, and the greater part of his hair, leaving only two or three stray white locks on either side.

He was sitting at a desk in his office, with a pen in his hand, and an ominous

looking paper before him, threatening unpleasantry to any person or persons whom it might concern; while at his elbow stood a tall, lank, rawboned individual, in a coat that might have seen better days, but they must have been at some period so remote that not a trace of them was visible in the patched and darned habiliment.

"Gribble," said the lawyer, "if the interest on that mortgage is not paid up by twelve o'clock to-morrow, we foreclose."

"I have had certain information, sir, that the uncle is arrived."

"Yes, yes—I know it; and if we wait another day the money will be forthcoming; but the time expires to-morrow at twelve, and I don't give a quarter of an hour beyond. Far too good a thing," he mumbled, half audibly, "to lose by waiting."

And the old clerk chuckled as he thought to himself—"My master is a deep one, and no mistake."

But whether Mr. Gribble approved or

contemned this somewhat professional quality of depth in his patron, there were no outward and visible tokens to indicate.

Just as the withered little lawyer had decided upon this benevolent and Christian-like act, Alfred Ballantine and Dupont walked into the office.

Mr. Bolton was all smiles and bows. Gribble vanished.

Alfred, who had no taste for flattery and fawning, cut all complimentary speeches short at once by stating his business as concisely as possible; and when he had concluded, the old man said, eagerly—

“But, my dear sir, you surely would not give up your claims without stronger evidence than this. The parties would have some difficulty in proving.”

But Alfred interrupted him by saying—

“I have no wish to dispute the question with them—it is not my intention to do so; but I should be glad to know whether you have any reason to believe that the eldest

son of Sir Reginald Cray was in England at the time Sir Lyttleton took possession of the property."

"Yes, I have good reason to know it, for he came here to examine the will. Poor fellow! he was sadly cut up about it—I was sorry for him; but it was no affair of mine. I had nothing to do with the family quarrels. My business was to act for my client, and he was rather a difficult man to deal with, was Sir Lyttleton."

"Do you suppose any interview took place between the brothers?"

"No, no! her ladyship took pretty good care of that. She saw him herself, though, and knew the strait he was in."

"And she did nothing to assist him, I suppose?"

"Not a bit of it. She is none of the soft sort; yet I fancy he had not a shilling in the world."

Mr. Bolton forgot to say that he was

himself none of the soft sort either, even to the extent of a glass of wine and a biscuit.

"Then what did he do?" said Alfred.

"What became of him?"

"Well, I heard nothing of him after that, till seven or eight years afterwards, when I happened to come in contact with a young man who had been with Flowers, who was formerly Sir Reginald's solicitor, and I asked him if he knew what had become of the disinherited son. He said he believed he was very poor, and had been doing something as an artist; but that Flowers had got him a situation in the house of some great West India merchant—he did tell me the name, but I forgot it."

"Was it Roby?"

"Roby! Well, it strikes me that it was. Yes, certainly, Roby was the name."

"Then, if any doubt remained," observed Alfred, turning towards Dupont, "that would settle it. Now, sir," he continued, addressing Mr. Bolton, "what we wish you

to do is to inform Lady Cray that her late husband's elder brother, who was, in fact, Sir Reginald Cray, died last year, leaving an only daughter, who, in consequence of the decease of the two young men, Milburn and Robert, becomes her uncle's sole heiress. We are authorized by the young lady to say that Lady Cray is at liberty to remain at Culverley as long as she pleases; but that if she would prefer living in London, or Paris, or anywhere else, the annuity of five hundred a year would be increased to one thousand."

"Bless my soul! a very liberal offer," said the lawyer, looking very much astonished, for he could not quite comprehend how it was possible for anyone to part with five hundred a year, having the power to retain it; however, he readily undertook the mission with which he was charged, promising to ride over to Culverley that same night, as the gentlemen intended to await his return.

Lady Cray was alone, brooding over her manifold sorrows, not with the pious resignation of a Christian, but with impious revilings against the decrees of Providence on her tongue, and with hatred and malice in her heart towards all mankind. The revelations of Mr. Bolton were not much calculated to calm the irritation of her mind, for the whole world could not have furnished forth a successor more unwelcome to her feelings than the daughter of Reginald Cray.

Her rage was something fearful. Even the lawyer, accustomed as he was to witness the evil passions inherent in the human race, was terrified at the violence of that wretched woman as she broke forth into furious invectives against the unfortunate victim of her husband's treachery and her own malevolence. Then the tide of her anger turned against poor Dupont, as having been the cause of the discovery; and she repudiated with contumely his good-natured

desire that she would allow him to pay her a visit, saying he only meant to insult her, and she never wished to see his face again.

At length, having exhausted her breath in vituperation, she became silent perforce ; and Mr. Bolton took advantage of this temporary lull of the storm to point out the positive advantages she might derive from the accession to the estate of one who had so handsomely offered to double her income ; and that, in his humble opinion, she had reason to be thankful for the change.

“ A mighty matter, truly, to be thankful for,” she answered, with scorn ; “ one paltry thousand a year for the wife of a man of Sir Lyttleton’s wealth—but the Crays are a low-minded set, and I detest the whole race ; so you may tell this upstart girl, this representative of two noble ancestors—a German fiddler and an English cotton spinner—you may tell her, sir, that I have no doubt she is worthy of her origin, and will

grace the position she is about to have the audacity to assume."

"But, my lady, if you mean to accept of this increased income, I should advise you to send a different sort of message, because the young lady might take offence, and withdraw the offer altogether."

This judicious view of the case was not without its effect. She began to see there was not much wisdom in provoking the resentment of the heiress, yet she could not bend her spirit to receive the liberal donation as anything but a right.

"Then tell her," she said, in a harsh voice, with pale and quivering lips, "tell her that this place is now hateful to my sight—that I shall leave it at once and for ever. I have not determined where to go, but will let you know as soon as I am settled, and through you this pitiful remittance may be made."

"Then your ladyship does not intend to see your niece?"

"My niece!" she screamed; "there's no blood of mine in her veins, man!"

Then, wringing her hand with a passionate gesture, she murmured—

"That my children should have died such a death, and that *his* daughter should rise up, armed with the power to turn me out of my home——"

Conscience finished the sentence thus—

"Even as I expelled her father."

On the day that Alfred went to Preston Miriam rode over to Mr. Thornton's abode to see his wife, and shew that she had not forgotten the assistance that good lady had rendered her when she stood so much in need of it.


Mrs. Thornton was all smiles and curtsies and congratulations. She was quite ashamed, she said, of the shabby things she had offered to the young lady's acceptance. She wished they had been a great deal better; but then, of course, she didn't know who the young lady was, or else she would

never have thought of giving her such an old dress, &c., &c.

"I assure you, my dear Mrs. Thornton," said Miriam, interrupting her, "your gift was a benefit for which I shall ever have cause to be grateful, for without it I could never have gone to Newland, and if I had not gone there, all these happy events would never have come to pass."

"Well, to be sure," replied the worthy matron. "It is truly wonderful to think, as I often say to the doctor, what little things sometimes help to bring about great changes in the world."

It is, indeed," said Miriam. "And now, as your presents proved of so much value to me, I must beg you will allow me to replace them with such as may be as useful to you as they would have been. I am going now to order some things for myself at Greenway's, and you must do me the favour to come with me, and choose a dress for yourself."



Mrs. Thornton was in a flutter of delight. Nothing pleased her so much as buying a new gown, but it was a happiness that was always restricted by the necessity of having an eye to economy in making her selection ; consequently, the idea of being at liberty to indulge her taste without restraint was a great event in her existence, and she joyfully prepared herself to accompany her visitor on this momentous errand.

After spending nearly two hours in Mr. Greenway's well-stocked shop, looking over a variety of silks, satins, and other tempting products of the loom, she returned home, happy in the acquisition of a rich brocaded silk dress, a beautiful French shawl, and a velvet bonnet of the newest fashion.

"And now, my dear madam," said Miriam, in taking her leave, "remember that I shall expect Mr. Thornton to bring you, and all the children, to spend a few days with me at Culverley before the summer is over ; and I hope in time we may be able

to induce him to fix his residence in that part of the country, for General Keith thinks he might make a very good connection there, and then we should see more of each other."

"Who would ever have supposed, William," said the good lady, as she exhibited Miriam's splendid presents to her admiring husband, "Who would ever have supposed all this would have come of those two or three bits of black things, that were not worth a single yard of this beautiful silk, and there are seventeen yards of it, at twelve shillings a yard."

"Well, my dear," he replied, laughing, "did I not tell you, your charity would be rewarded sevenfold; and you see I was more than right, for it is seventeen fold. But you well deserve it, Kate, I must say, for there was very little prospect at the time that it would ever be rewarded in this way at all."

CHAPTER VIII.

Lady Cray, who had not deigned to notice, even by a single line in acknowledgment, the liberal addition made by Miriam to her annual stipend, intimated through Mr. Bolton that she had made up her mind to live abroad; but that, as she did not choose to be subject to anybody's caprices, she desired before she left the country, that a deed should be properly executed and given into her possession, securing to her the extra five hundred a year, so that it

might not be in the power of the donor to withdraw it.

This ungracious request was immediately complied with, and she took her departure from Culverley Rise, whence she proceeded to the pleasant little town of St. Helier, in the Island of Jersey, where she could make a grander appearance upon the income she now possessed, than in any one of the larger capitals; for the ruling passion was still strong—her pride was unsubdued—and, although she constantly pined in bitterness of spirit, although her thoughts found nothing to dwell upon—either past, present, or future—that could afford one moment's happiness, still she made very high pretensions, and devoted all the energy that trouble and anxiety had left her, to the unworthy purpose of holding her head above the rest of the little world of which she formed a part, and where few had such ample means at their disposal.

Dupont had not seen her at all, for she

had taken no notice of his visit, and, after the recent disclosures, he felt so little inclination to renew the intercourse, that it appeared to be a relief to him rather than otherwise when he heard she was gone.

He had been persuaded to give up all idea of leaving Newland Hall for the present, and, in fact, it had not required any very powerful arguments to induce him to remain for the rest of the summer, as his own wishes coincided entirely with the cordial invitation he received to that effect.

"For my part," said the General, "I don't see why you should leave us at all, so long as you stay in England, since you say you have neither friends nor relatives in this country now the old lady is gone."


"Pardon me General. I have been so happy as to find friends and relatives too."

"Well, I am glad you look upon us in that light, so let it be a settled thing that you are to consider this as your home, and if you want to see a little more of London,

you can run up for a few days whenever you choose. There shall be no restriction upon you whatever. Go where you like, and when you like, but understand that my house is your head quarters."

As soon as it was ascertained that Lady Cray had really left England, Miriam prepared herself, with a grateful heart, to bid adieu to a scene endeared to her by so many happy events, and it was not the least of her pleasures, on the evening before her departure, to pay a stolen visit alone to the orchard, where she had walked with Alfred the last night of her former sojourn at the hall, when he had so nearly 'told his love'—for she knew it all now, and it was happiness unspeakable to contrast the present with the past, and recall to mind herself as she was then.

On the morrow she departed from Newland in a style befitting the rich heiress and granddaughter of the millionaire, Sir Reginald Cray, to take possession of her broad



lands and noble mansion. She was accompanied by Mrs. Ballantine, Alfred, and General Keith, the latter having volunteered to make one of the party, that he might have the pleasure of being amongst the first to see her installed in her rightful home.

The journey was a very pleasant one. The day was as bright as such happy days ought to be, and when the carriage turned into the road leading to the park gates, an interesting sight presented itself.

All the tenantry of the late baronet, and a great number of rustics from the surrounding villages, in their best attire, were assembled at this spot to await the arrival of the travellers, and offer their humble tribute of welcome to the future mistress of the domain.

When she understood who they were, and why they had come there, her emotions became too powerful to be restrained, and leaning her head against Mrs. Ballantine,

she sobbed aloud, whilst the air resounded with the joyous hurrahs of the people.

It was a beautiful sight to see the young girls in their holiday dresses, presenting at the carriage windows bouquets of such simple flowers as their rustic gardens produced, to their new lady, who received them with smiles and tears of grateful pleasure. It was, indeed, a triumphal entry.

Amongst the assemblage were several very aged men and women, who remembered her father in the spring time of his life, and her grandmother, the gentle Lady Elizabeth, whose memory was still revered; and every now and then she could distinguish some feeble voice uplifted to exclaim —“God bless the daughter of the good Mr. Reginald!”

It was one of those moments of ecstatic bliss so rarely accorded to mortals, and yet one bitter drop was mingled in the overflowing cup of sweets, as if to prove that perfect happiness has no existence in this

world. If her father had but lived to see this day, her joy would have been complete, but he had never been cheered with even a distant gleaming of the blessings that were now heaped by the bounteous hand of Providence upon her head, and it was this reflection that cast its shadow on the otherwise unclouded scene.

It was generally believed that she had come from abroad, a report that had been carefully circulated by Mrs. Robson, the housekeeper, who was wise enough to know it would be better, if possible, to suppress the fact that the young mistress of Culverley had filled a subordinate situation in the family of Lady Cray's relations; and, with this view, she had dismissed such of the domestics as would have recognised her as the governess who was there in the summer, and engaged new ones to whom she was personally unknown.

The carriage passed through the gates into the broad avenue of majestic chesnut

trees. Then General Keith took her hand, and said—

“Let me be the first, my dear Miss Cray, to wish you joy. You are now on your own land, and may you long reign over it.”

She thanked him with her whole heart, and received the congratulations of her future husband and mother with smiles and blushes, that tempted the General to put forth an appendix to his own speech in this mischievous form—

“It is really a fine territory, young lady; and I sincerely hope you will live long and happily in the enjoyment of it, and that it may descend in peace and prosperity to your children’s children for many generations to come!”

She could not help laughing at these extended views, and answered—

“At any rate, General, as long as I hold the sceptre, I shall hope to reckon you amongst my most frequent guests.”

To which he replied, good humouredly—

“If I am able to give you the opportunity of tolerating me now and then for the next ten years, my dear lady, I shall be quite contented, and ought to think myself a lucky man.”

The carriage now stopped at the great entrance. The hall doors were thrown wide open for the entrance of the young mistress of the mansion, and two footmen, in handsome liveries, were waiting at the bottom of the steps to open the door of the vehicle, while several other servants were in attendance, all ready to do her slightest bidding. What a contrast was this to her former reception there! She could scarcely believe in its reality even now.

Alfred sprang out of the carriage, and assisted her to alight, and, as she entered the house, leaning on his arm, he whispered, softly—

“My own Miriam—this is *our* home.”

She could not speak; her heart was too

full for utterance ; but she turned her eyes to his face with a look of such intense happiness, such perfect trust, that the most doubting and exacting of lovers must have been satisfied.

And now, for the first time, she entered the magnificent range of apartments to which, during her former visit, she had not the 'entrée.' They were very splendid, for all that was most costly and elegant in them were relics of the pride and pomp of Sir Reginald Cray, who had spared no expense in fitting up these rooms in a most luxurious fashion ; and although his son would never have laid out so much money in pictures of great excellence, bronzes, curiously wrought cabinets, mosaic tables, glasses of extraordinary magnitude, and various ornaments of a rare and valuable description, yet it was easy to preserve all these things, and keep up the same style, without any very great outlay, so that his vanity was gratified at little cost. Every

thing had been put into the best order against the arrival of the heiress, and as Miriam gazed around her upon all this splendour, she said to herself—"Can it be possible that I am mistress here? Is all this really mine? Oh, my beloved father! Why was it not thine also?"

Amongst the servants assembled in the hall, Miriam had looked around for the housekeeper, to whose attentions she had been indebted for the few comforts she enjoyed during her first memorable visit. But Mrs. Robson was nowhere to be seen, having, in fact, kept out of the way from motives of delicacy, feeling that her presence at such a moment would naturally remind her young mistress of the unpleasant circumstances attending her former arrival, which, it was probable, she might desire to bury in oblivion. Such, however, was not the case. Miriam asked for her immediately, and, when she came, received her respectful welcome with smiling thanks, and

adverted to her former kindness so unaffectedly, and with such a grateful remembrance of it, that the excellent woman was highly gratified, and became devotedly attached to her from that moment.

But there arose another, and still more powerful cause to bind the mistress and the servant to each other, for Mrs. Robson had lived in the family since her early girlhood. She had known Reginald Cray as heir of Culverley, and was able to relate many an incident of his home life that could not fail to be interesting to his orphan child.

But this was yet unknown to Miriam, who did not discover till the next day what a new and abundant source of pleasure was thus about to be opened to her, for she had always looked upon Mrs. Robson as Lady Cray's servant, and had never for a moment entertained an idea that she had been a member of the former household.

"I have had my late lady's room prepared for you for to-night, my lady," she

said. (Oh, how strangely it sounded to Miriam to be thus addressed.) "But tomorrow, of course, any alteration can be made that you desire."

"And your's, madam," she added, speaking to Mrs. Ballantine, "will be the one you had before. I thought you would like that best, being used to it."

"Thank you, Mrs. Robson. I am sure it will be comfortable if you have seen to it."

"And the gentlemen," said Miriam. "I hope you have provided for them."

"Yes, my lady. I have sent Dennis to show them to their rooms, and see that all their things are carried up; and if you please, I will show you to your's, as the dinner will be served in half an hour."

In the way to her sleeping apartment, Miriam had to pass along the gallery where she encountered Alfred Ballantine in her flight from Milburn Cray, on that memorable day when she wandered in silent soli-

tude, as a friendless stranger, through the house that was her father's birthright, and was so soon to be her own; and this reminiscence, more than any other, seemed to overpower her, for she paused at the foot of the narrow, winding staircase, and in fancy again heard the footsteps of that ill-fated young man following her. The recollection was so vivid, and the emotions it excited were so powerful, that, unable to suppress them, she leaned against the balustrade and burst into tears.

The kind-hearted housekeeper was sadly distressed at this outburst of feeling, and ran to procure a glass of wine as a restorative, saying to herself, "I don't wonder at it. This has been a trying day for her."

Miriam drank the wine, because she thought it would gratify the good woman to make use of her specific, and having now recovered her composure, she proceeded to her apartment to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER IX.

Poor Dupont had certainly experienced a feeling very much akin to disappointment, on being put in possession of the state of affairs between Miriam and Alfred Ballantine; and if his mercurial temperament helped him to get over it sooner than a man of graver disposition might have done, it had a sufficiently weighty influence to prevent him from joining the party to Culverley Rise.

“You will stay with us a few days,

General Keith?" said Miriam, as the old gentleman was preparing to take a stroll in the park on the following morning after breakfast.

"No, my dear; I return to-day most certainly; but I do not say that I shall not make a longer visit next time."

"And why not now?" said Alfred.

"For the best of all reasons, my good friend. I have promised to go home. Besides," he added, laughing, "you forget that I have left that good looking Frenchman to take care of my wife. Who knows but what I may find she has taken wing when I get back again, hey?"

"I imagine you are vain enough to make yourself pretty easy on that score, General."

"Why, yes; I am not much afraid of being cut out, even by a gay young gentleman like Mr. Ballantine, and that's something for a man of seventy to say. Don't you think so, Miss Cray?"

"I cannot say that I do think it very remarkable in your particular case, sir."

"Ah! There you go. Flattery, flattery! When will you ladies leave off spoiling us elderly gentlemen?"

"When elderly gentlemen leave off being young and agreeable," she replied gaily.

"Come along, General," said Alfred, who was ready to accompany him in his walk. "I must put an end to this, or I see I shall have to call you out after all."

As soon as the gentlemen were gone, Mrs. Ballantine retired to her own room, to spend an hour in devotional exercises, as was her invariable custom, and Miriam took this opportunity of going all over the house, with Mrs. Robson for her guide. It was now that she learned with surprise and pleasure how long that faithful domestic had been attached to the family, and that she had known her father in his early life.

She was present when Reginald came of age; and his birthday festival—the grand

jubilee of her young days—was a theme on which she delighted to dwell. She was never tired of talking of it, and her auditor was never tired of listening. She showed Miriam which had been her father's sleeping apartment, which his study; and when they came to the great ball room, she described in vivid colours the splendid scene it presented on that memorable festal day.

“I never shall forget it, miss, if I were to live for a thousand years. How handsome and noble young Mr. Reginald looked as he stood just here where you stand now, at the head of the long table, and made such a beautiful speech to the company when they drank his health, and wished him a long life; and my lady, his mother, sate here, where I am now, looking at him with tears in her eyes, so proud and so happy. There was a gallery put up at that end for the musicians, and I, being but a little girl, got in there and saw it all. I

can show you the gold goblet Mr. Reginald drank out of when he returned thanks to the company—and then such compliments were paid him by the grand ladies, in their white satins, and diamonds, and feathers. Ah! miss; there was more than one among them that wouldn't have wanted asking twice, as my poor father used to say, for he was very fond of Mr. Reginald."

Miriam listened to every word with breathless attention. Could it be her father that was thus spoken of? Her poor, blind, old father, the recipient of charity, to whom even a single glass of wine, to give a little strength to his debilitated frame, was a luxury almost unattainable.

"What was your father's name, Mrs. Robson?"

"His name was Jacobs, miss; he lived butler in the family for many years. He was very much attached to Mr. Reginald, but he never liked Sir Lyttleton at all; and I heard him say, the very day after

that grand entertainment—it was to my mother he was speaking—‘Depend upon it,’ says he, ‘that young man, Mr. Lyttleton, has an evil eye upon his brother, and will do him some mischief one of these days.’ And his words were true enough, for, after he left Sir Lyttleton’s service, he told me all, but desired I would never talk of it, and I never have, for if Lady Cray had known that I knew as much as I did, I should not have been here now.”

“But there can be no reason why I should not be made acquainted with all you know,” said Miriam.

“Certainly not, miss. When Sir Reginald was taken so ill, both the young gentlemen were in Germany, and old Lord Milburn, who was staying here at the time, wrote to Mr. Lyttleton, to bid him come home directly, and to let his brother know that his father was not expected to live, and desired that he would return as quickly as possible. But Mr. Lyttleton came by

himself, and told his father that his brother had left the place where they had both been staying, but he had sent him a message, to bid him come over to England directly. However, he never came, and a report got to Sir Reginald's ears that he was married; and I never shall forget the fury he was in. We could hear his ravings all over the house, for he was a very violent man. Then he sent for his lawyer, a gentleman named Flowers, from London."

"Flowers!" exclaimed Miriam; "are you sure that was the name?"

"Yes, ma'am, quite sure. He had been here many times. Perhaps you have heard of him?"

"Often—very often. He was my father's best and most intimate friend."

"Surely! Well, he tried to be a friend to him at that time, at any rate; for the old gentleman wanted to make a new will to cut off Mr. Reginald, and make Mr. Lyttleton his heir; but this good gentle-

man, Mr. Flowers, would not do it, and told him he ought to know the truth before he did that. So he went away, and Sir Reginald wrote a letter to his son, and he said to my father—‘Here, Jacobs, see that this letter is taken to the post.’ But Mr. Lyttleton, who was in the room, said—‘Give it to me, sir; I am going to ride that way, and I will take it.’ My father was very vexed, for he had a great idea Mr. Lyttleton never sent that letter at all, so he wrote himself to Mr. Reginald, to warn him of what was going on, but soon afterwards the old gentleman got worse, and Mr. Bolton, the lawyer, was here with him a good deal. I have no great opinion of that Mr. Bolton, no more had my father, but he was all hand and glove with Mr. Lyttleton, and my father always said they managed the new will between them, so that Mr. Reginald was cut out of every thing.”

To this brief narrative, Mrs. Robson

added an account of Reginald's visit to Culverley, after his father's death, and the rude manner in which he was treated by Lady Cray, whose conduct on that occasion had been reported in the servants' hall by the man who had opened the door to him, and whose curiosity was so far excited by his announcing himself as Sir Reginald Cray, that he made bold to listen through the keyhole to all that passed between Lady Cray and the mysterious visitor, which did not tend to increase her ladyship's popularity among the servants.


Miriam was now very thankful she had been spared the unpleasantness of an interview with the woman she had so much reason to hold in abhorrence; she was thankful too that not a word even of common courtesy had ever passed between them, and although she did not in the least regret the liberal act by which she had doubled Lady Cray's income, she was exceedingly glad it had been so unthankfully

received, for had it been otherwise, it might have led to an interchange of civilities it would always have been painful to her to think of.

"I never had any great liking for my lady," Mrs. Robson continued ; " but I was not singular in that, for nobody in the house had, I believe, if the truth was known ; but I was attached to the place, and could not bear the thought of leaving it."

"It was very natural," said Miriam, "to become attached to a place where you had lived from your childhood. Where was that picture before it was brought to this room, Mrs. Robson?" and she pointed to a fine oil painting that hung against the wall and had attracted her attention the moment she entered the room, so that her eyes had continually turned towards it while the housekeeper was talking of the olden times.

It was a full length portrait of her father



in the same attitude, and the same dress, as the miniature in her possession, which, it was evident, had been taken from it.

"I think it hung in the dining room, Miss, till old Sir Reginald died, and then it was brought up here, with a great many other things, that Sir Lyttleton did not like to see about. The picture was painted just before Mr. Reginald came of age, and a small one was done from it for Lady Elizabeth. I never could find what became of that."

"I have it," said Miriam. "My father must have taken it with him when he went to Germany. But I was in this room when I was here before, Mrs. Robson, and that picture certainly was not here then."

"Yes it was, Miss; but it was covered over with a green baize, and stood in that corner."

When she pointed to the place where it had stood, Miriam knew it was the very picture she was going to look at when she


was so rudely interrupted in her interesting researches by Sir Milburn Cray.

“Good Heavens, how near I was to making the discovery then!” she mentally exclaimed. “But it is better as it is. I am very glad I did not see it that day.”

Then she told the housekeeper she would have it taken down again, and hung in the dining room, where it was before, which Mrs. Robson promised should be done immediately.

The business of the morning had been so exciting that, before she rejoined her friends, Miriam retired to her own room for awhile to compose her agitated spirits, and think over all she had just heard, which, together with Mr. Dupont's revelations, had put her in possession of the whole history of her father's life.

Then she reflected on the almost miraculous chain of circumstances that had brought the truth to light, and being naturally disposed to believe, to a certain extent, in



superhuman influences, she thought she could now account for the strange emotions she had experienced on first entering that neglected ball-room, when she felt as if she was treading on enchanted ground.

One thing, however, she resolved upon, and that was, to restore the room as nearly as possible to what it was in the time of Sir Reginald Cray, a work that might be accomplished without much difficulty by the aid of such vestiges of its former splendour as were yet discernible, and of Mrs. Robson's memory, which still retained, with minute exactness, the arrangement of the whole interior.

As General Keith intended to return by the railway, which took him within about four miles of his own house, he stayed to lunch at Culverley, and, before his departure, took an opportunity of saying to Miriam—

“I shall hope, my dear Miss Cray, to be present on an occasion that, I judge, is not

far distant ; and as I believe there is no one who has a claim to take the place of a father at the ceremonial, and can truly say I feel a sincere interest in all that concerns you, I trust you will allow me to perform that office."

Miriam was much gratified by this proposal, and most readily gave her promise to the friendly old gentleman that no one but himself should give her away at the altar, declaring, however, that such an event was not likely to take place for a very long time, at which he laughed, and shook his head, saying—

"I suppose it is the proper thing for young ladies always to protest that marriage is a long way off until the breakfast is ordered and the company invited. Nevertheless, I shall take an early opportunity of getting a new pair of white gloves, and I don't think they are likely to turn yellow by keeping."

CHAPTER X.

Before she left Newland Hall to take possession of her inheritance, Miriam had resolved that the first act of her new life should be to pay those honours to her departed parent which were due to his rank, by removing him from the obscure and nameless grave where he now rested among strangers, to the burial place of his family, that he might not be forgotten in the records of his race. Every time she passed through the hall, she beheld, in

imagination, the spectral vision of her sleep, and each time that it was thus forcibly recalled to mind, the impression became still stronger that the solemn rite she contemplated was a sacred duty preternaturally enjoined.

Alfred and Mrs. Ballantine both entered into her wishes, for they admired and sympathized with the feelings that dictated them.

“And I think, my dear Miriam,” said Mrs. Ballantine, “till this ceremony is over, you should decline receiving visits. There will, of course, be a great many people desirous of calling on you, but we must let it be understood why you wish to remain in private for the present; and when the solemnity takes place, which had better be as soon as possible, it will be supposed that Mr. Cray was buried abroad many years ago, and is only now brought to England.”

“We may speak of him as Sir Reginald Cray,” said Alfred, “for, as Miriam is so

young, everybody must know that he did not die thirty years ago, as was supposed. The popular belief will now be that he was disinherited for marrying against his father's consent, and continued to reside abroad ; but as the simple fact of living in a foreign country would not affect his title, we need not suppress it, as his father's will could not deprive him of that."

"How shall it be done?" Miriam asked, with tears in her eyes, alluding to the disinterment of the dead.

"I will see to it, dearest," replied Alfred. "Mr. Thornton will be able to point out to me the exact spot."

"Yes, yes, he can," said Miriam. "And you must beg of him to come here on the day. Oh ! Alfred, if you did but know the comfort he was to me then—then, when I had not another friend in the world, you would respect him as I do."

"I do know it, love, and I do respect him. He shall certainly be here, and I am

sure it will gratify him very much to be invited to attend. I think we must get the good doctor to come and live nearer to us. Don't you think it would be a good thing, mother? for he has but a poor practice where he is; that is, he has plenty of practice, but very little pay for it."

"And how can you be sure he would be any better off here, Alfred?"

"Why, you must know I have been making some inquiries with that view, and I find that Doctor Phillips is going to leave the neighbourhood."

"Indeed! I thought he was very much liked here, and had a large connection."

"Yes, he has a very large connection, but his brother, who is a first-rate physician in London, is about to retire on the immense fortune he has made, and Doctor Phillips means to succeed him. So you see, there will be a good opening here for somebody, and Thornton may as well have the advantage of it as any one else. He must get a Scotch diploma, and write himself Doctor

Thornton at once. What do you think of my plan, Miriam?"

"I think it is an excellent one; but Doctor Phillips may himself, perhaps, have some friend to introduce."

"No, he has not, for I have already spoken to him on the subject. I have had it in my mind for some weeks, but have said nothing to Thornton, as I wanted to know first what you and my mother thought about it."

"I should have thought Doctor Phillips would require a good sum of money before he let any one come into his connection," said Mrs. Ballantine.

"Well, the truth is, he does want a consideration, and I have agreed to find the needful, but there is no occasion for Thornton to know that. It is a matter between me and Phillips. He will have nothing to do with it."

Mrs. Ballantine smiled at this arrangement, so characteristic of her son, and

Miriam thanked him with her whole heart, for she knew it was his love for her that had prompted him to act so generously towards the man whose kindness to her had been the origin of all her present happiness.

It was about a month after Miriam's accession to her grandfather's estate, that the remains of Reginald Cray were taken from that secluded spot in the old churchyard where they were first laid to rest, and, being placed in a leaden coffin, were conveyed with befitting solemnity to Culverley Rise. It was generally believed, as Mrs. Ballantine had surmised, that the body was brought from abroad, for there were very few who knew the real history of the father and daughter, and not one of the household, except Mrs. Robson, ever became aware that Lady Wilsden's governess and the young mistress of Culverley were one and the same person.

During ten days the house was shut up as if for a recent death; then the second

interment took place, and the pious, affectionate daughter, arrayed in the deepest mourning, saw from the gallery, where, with her future mother-in-law, she was kneeling in prayer, those beloved remains borne through the hall, followed by all the friends who were most dear to her, and so exactly did the pageant resemble what she had seen in her dream, that she almost expected to awaken in the miserable cottage where her father died, and find that the past twelve-month was but an illusion of a single night.

Amongst those who assisted at the funeral solemnities was Camille Dupont, and, in paying this tribute of regard to his former friend, his heartfelt sorrow was the deeper from being mingled with self reproach. General Keith also testified his friendship for the living by shewing this mark of respect to the memory of the dead; and Mr. Thornton had willingly responded to Miriam's request, and, as he stood among the group of mourners assembled in the

vault around the magnificent coffin of his late poor patient, he sobbed like a child on recalling to mind the scene at his humble grave in the old churchyard.

He stayed that night at Culverley Rise, and the next day Alfred Ballantine took occasion as they were walking together through the park, which Mr. Thornton had never seen before, to mention the expected departure of Doctor Phillips from that part of the country, and the fine opening it would make for a medical practitioner.

"It will indeed be a capital thing for anyone who has the means of getting into it," said Mr. Thornton, "but I suppose he will want a good round sum for such a practice as he has."

"Nothing of the kind," said Alfred; "so if you have any inclination to step into his shoes I have no doubt they would fit you exceedingly well."

"My dear sir, you surely cannot be in earnest."

“Why not?”

“Because there will be so many men of higher standing than myself ready to take advantage of such an opportunity.”

“Pooh! nonsense! You want nothing but the M.D., and that may easily be obtained in Scotland at a very trifling cost. In fact, I am pretty sure that if you were to put yourself forward, or let somebody put you forward as being desirous of succeeding Dr. Phillips, you would stand a better chance than anyone else; and if you like I will ride over with you this morning and introduce you to him.”

“If I like! Why, I should think myself the most fortunate man alive to get such a lift all at once as that in the world. Are you on sufficiently intimate terms with the Doctor to ensure me a civil reception?”

“Oh, yes. We are on excellent terms, and I have already spoken of you to him as a man well fitted to fill his place; so there is no fear about the reception.”

"And you are certain no money is required?"

"There will be the lease of the house to take off his hands I suppose, and a few other odd matters, perhaps; but if you should not find it convenient to spare a hundred or two just at the moment, I am quite sure General Keith would accommodate you, or I myself will do so with the greatest pleasure."

"My dear Mr. Ballantine, I thank you with all my heart. This is such an unexpected stroke of good fortune that I hardly know how to believe in it. What does Miss Cray say about it?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, I knew there was nothing she would like better than to have you so near to us; therefore, if you succeed, and I have not the least doubt about that, it will be Miss Cray, not Mr. Ballantine, you will have to thank for it."

The horses were ordered, and the two

gentlemen rode over to the small town where Dr. Phillips resided.

He was at home, and received them in the courteous manner for which he was so eminently distinguished; and after some conversation with Mr. Thornton he said he was perfectly satisfied that he was qualified to take a higher position in the medical world than he at present occupied, and should be happy to introduce him to the principal families he had himself been in the habit of attending.

Not a word was said about the *consideration*, for Dr. Phillips was quite aware that little matter was entirely between himself and Mr. Ballantine. Consequently Mr. Thornton gave him rather more credit than he merited for liberality and disinterestedness; but the Doctor was a very excellent man, nevertheless, and not more worldly-minded than thousands of very estimable persons.

Miriam had been too much saddened by

the solemnities of the preceding day to make any particular demonstration of the joy she really felt at this happy change in the affairs of her esteemed friend; but it was enough for him when she pressed his hand affectionately in both hers, and said softly, the tears glistening in her eyes, "You know how glad I am."

Some weeks more had glided by. It was a glorious morning in the month of June, the village bells were ringing out a merry peal, and the whole way from the park gates to the church door was thronged with eager expectants awaiting the approach of the bridal train, for it was Miriam's wedding day.

There were present on the joyous occasion, Lord and Lady Wilsden, General and Mrs. Keith, Mr. Dupont, Doctor Thornton, and some of the neighbouring gentry, whose daughters officiated as bridesmaids.

The path of the happy bride was now literally as well as figuratively strewn with

flowers, and loud cheers greeted her on all sides as she passed along. But the most remarkable token of the respect and goodwill of the tenantry was a triumphal arch that had been prepared beforehand, and was raised over the park gates whilst the marriage ceremony was being performed in the church, so that the line of carriages, in returning, should pass under it. The arch itself was formed of green wire net work, covered with light creeping plants, gracefully arranged, and on this verdant background was displayed a curious and tasteful device, that elicited a burst of applause from the admiring guests. In large distinct letters, formed entirely of roses, were the words 'Health and happiness to the noble pair,' and this invocation was surmounted by a beautiful wreath of orange blossoms.

Plenty of good cheer had been sent down to the village, that the people might make holiday and enjoy themselves, the scene of festivity being the village green,

and it was remarked by some of the elders that there had not been such a joyful day at Culverley since Mr. Reginald came of age.

It was truly remarkable that the poor people belonging to the estate, in talking of former benefits received, or pleasures enjoyed, seldom failed to make some allusion to Miriam's father, but no one ever mentioned the name of Lyttleton Cray.

Mrs. Robson was the happiest and proudest of housekeepers on that momentous day. She had helped to dress her young lady, and had persuaded her to let the breakfast be laid out in the great ball room, which had been partially renovated, and being thus once more prepared for a gay assemblage, carried the good woman back again to the days of her girlhood.

Among the numerous bridal gifts presented to Miriam on the eve of the wedding was a splendid pair of diamond bracelets, given her by General Keith, which she received with grateful pleasure, and wore

on the marriage day ; but it may be doubted whether this costly offering was so truly gratifying to her feelings as the simple bouquet of flowers he had once presented to her at Newland Hall under very different circumstances, for there are times and seasons when a kind word or look may give a value to the merest trifle that raises it above all price.

After the breakfast came the leave taking, as the bride and bridegroom were departing on their wedding tour, and as it was their intention, after visiting Paris, to proceed to Germany, they had exacted a promise from Mr. Dupont to meet them at Munich, for reasons that need no explanation. He had exhibited signs of being so much struck by the charms of one of the six fair bridesmaids, that the General remarked to Mrs. Ballantine he did not think his French friend would require much persuasion to induce him to give up his plan of leading a single life ; and in the course of the morn-

ing, when heard making some inquiries about an estate in the immediate vicinity of Culverley that was for sale, Alfred said to him—

“You could not do better, my dear fellow, than come and settle yourself amongst us. Your lot is cast in with ours, depend upon it; and as all our present happiness has been brought about by your interposition, we shall henceforth look upon you as the good genius of CULVERLEY RISE.”

THE END.

THE BATTLE EVE.



THE BATTLE EVE.

CHAPTER I.

On the evening of the fifteenth of June, in the year of our Lord, 1815, an English officer, apparently about thirty years of age, was sitting by the side of a couch in the handsomely furnished drawing room of a private house near the Park at Brussels, watching with anxious looks the pale face of a young and beautiful woman, whose eyes were closed either in sleep or weariness, as she lay perfectly still, one hand clasped in that of her fond husband, the

other hidden beneath a splendid Indian shawl that was thrown over her. The mind of the watcher seemed but ill at ease as he gazed thoughtfully upon the languid form before him; and he had, in truth, much cause for the anxiety visible on his fine countenance, for various reports had been circulated during the day that had spread an alarm throughout the city of an approaching battle, and he was fearful of being called away from his beloved wife at a time when she most needed his presence and attention, as she was in hourly expectation of becoming a mother. He had, however, taken special care that no unpleasant rumours should reach her ears, and could only hope and pray they might prove to be unfounded, and that he should at least be permitted to embrace his first child ere the awful summons came that might enrol the mother and her babe among "the fatherless children and the widows."

Captain Roper was the elder of two bro-

thers, at this period with the army at Brussels, but in different regiments. The captain had served in the Peninsular war, but, in consequence of a severe wound that reduced him to a very weak state, he had lately been home on leave, and during his stay in England had married a young lady to whom he was devotedly attached. Soon after his marriage, the death of his father put him in possession of a considerable estate in Derbyshire, which, being entailed, had descended in regular succession to the heirs male of the Roper family from the time of James I., and it was a subject of proud mention on the part of the late Mr. Roper, or Squire Roper, as he was usually called, that Newborough Hall had never been encumbered by a mortgage. It was indeed a valuable property, consequently the eldest son of the family had always been a person of consideration, whilst the rest were but scantily provided for, unless they were lucky enough to build

up their own fortune on the basis of a professional career.

At the time when the two brothers, Henry and Clement, entered the army, there was another son still older, who, as heir to the estate, was brought up with the habits and views of an independent country gentleman, but he was accidentally killed whilst hunting; and thus Henry, who had attained to the rank of captain, became the heir apparent of Newborough Hall. Still, as the war was then at its height, he made it a point of honor not to give up his commission till peace should be restored, when it was his intention to retire from the service altogether, and enjoy, with his beloved Mary, the calm delights of a country life.

But Fate ordained it otherwise. Vainly doth man say to himself, "Thus will I do;" a single hour—nay, even a single moment, may suffice to overturn the plans of years, and to ruin the finest structure of human

happiness ever erected by the hopes of shortsighted mortals.

When the term of his leave of absence was expired, Captain Roper, accompanied by his young wife, rejoined his regiment at Brussels, then the head quarters of the British army. The state of affairs at that time seemed to promise a period of repose and enjoyment to the brave men who had grown weary of the protracted wars in Spain, and longed for a season of rest, brief though it might be; and few had anticipated so sudden a call to arms as was threatened by the rumours that were abroad on the day when this story commences, the Thursday preceding the memorable Battle of Waterloo. The evening was far advanced and Captain Roper was still sitting by the side of his slumbering wife, when the door was softly opened and a handsome young man in the full dress uniform of a cavalry officer entered the apartment. The husband made a sign to him to be silent,

and gently releasing the hand of the sleeping lady, he rose from his seat and quietly walked with his brother to a window at the far end of the room.

"What news, Clement?" he asked, in a whisper.

"No positive news; but there seems every chance of a speedy engagement. You have said nothing to your wife, I suppose?"

"Not a word, for I dread the consequences. God grant all may be safely over with her before anything takes place!"

"I hope it may; but some of us think we shall have to march before this time to-morrow. Are you going to the ball to-night?"

"No—I shall not leave her unless I am obliged. You will be there, of course?"

"Oh, yes—all our's are going; we may as well enjoy ourselves while we can, for we shall have balls of another kind before long, I expect."

Just at this moment Mrs. Roper opened her eyes, and said, in a languid tone—

“Were you speaking of the ball, Lieutenant Roper?”

“Yes; but your husband says he does not intend to go.”

“He is very kind,” she replied, turning her soft blue eyes affectionately towards him; “but, dear Henry, if you wish it, I think I am well enough to spare you for an hour or two.”

“Thank you, my love, I do not wish it—I would rather not leave you at all to-night, and I have no desire whatever to go.”

“Then I shall be off,” said the lieutenant, glancing at his own elegant figure in a large mirror that reached from the ceiling nearly to the floor. “Good bye, Harry; good bye, Mrs. Roper. I hope all will be well soon.”

The young wife held out her hand and bade him good night with a smile, for she thought the hope he had just expressed

alluded entirely to herself and the infant yet unborn, and did not observe the glance of fearful meaning interchanged between the two brothers that might have told another tale.

The ball in question was given by the Duchess of Richmond to the British officers. It was a gay and brilliant assemblage. The Duke of Wellington was present, and many persons of the highest distinction in Brussels were there. The dancing commenced with spirit; no thought of coming danger seemed to interfere with the enjoyment of the passing hour; yet, could any spectator of the scene have opened the book of Fate and read therein all that was written on the next day's page, how would he have shuddered at the light-hearted smiles and springing footsteps of the revellers, so many of whom were, in a few short hours, to be numbered with the dead. Suddenly the music ceased, and there was a strange appearance of bustle and excitement, as if

something extraordinary had happened. The waltzers stopped short, and anxiously looked around, wondering what could be the cause of the interruption. The ladies, pale and trembling with fear, collected together in groups, whilst their partners crowded round the great Commander-in-Chief, who was standing at the upper end of the room giving some hasty orders, for he had just received a despatch that made it necessary to get the troops under arms without a moment's delay. There was no time for ceremony; the party was broken up at once; a few hurried adieus were spoken, and the guests departed as they best might, many of the cavalry officers, whose quarters were in the villages at some distance, galloping off without staying to change their attire.

It was near midnight when Captain Roper, too anxious to retire to rest, was beguiling the tedious hours with the first volume of "Guy Mannering," and half

wishing he was himself skilled in the science of astrology, that he might consult the stars with regard to the future destiny of his own expected heir. "If it should be a boy," he said to himself, "he shall be named Harry Bertram, for this story seems to have a peculiar charm for me to-night; yet if my child's horoscope predicted evil, I fear I have enough of superstition about me to let it weigh upon my mind—but hark! what is that?" He threw aside the book and listened attentively, for his ear caught the distant sounds of the heavy rolling of drums, and the deep tones of the bugle calling the soldiers to instant muster—"Ay, there it is!" he muttered, with a smile that was full of bitterness. "It is rather hard, but there is no help for it. Heaven protect my poor wife!" The war-like din grew louder every instant, till at length it awakened Mary from a deep sleep, and she started up in terror.

"Henry, dear, what is the matter?"

"Do not frighten yourself, love; I expect it is only a false alarm."

"But what are the drums beating for? Something dreadful is going to happen, I know."

"Nothing very dreadful, I hope;" he replied, affecting to laugh; then added, in as careless a manner as he could assume, "in fact, I expected something of this sort, for there were some vague reports flying about this morning of a little skirmish between the French and the Prussians, and it was said we might be called out at very short notice, just to show that we were on the alert—that's all."

At this moment the mistress of the house, evidently in great consternation, opened the door and beckoned to the captain, who instantly left the room. His servant had come with a message from the colonel that he must be ready to march in half an hour, but the man could give him no information

as to the destined route of the troops, or the cause of so sudden a movement.

The reader is, no doubt, acquainted with the events that immediately preceded the Battle of Waterloo—therefore, it would be superfluous to detail them here, nor would we, except so far as to make our story intelligible, dwell on the particulars of an engagement that, it is to be hoped, will evermore be recorded as the last act of hostility between the two greatest nations in the world, now so happily united in peace and friendship with each other.

It was a hard task for Captain Roper to communicate this painful intelligence to his wife; and, although he made as light of it as possible, and endeavoured to soothe her with assurances that there was no real ground for uneasiness, and that he should probably return in a few hours, she could not restrain her passionate grief, but clung to him with all the despair of one who felt that they should never meet again.

Alas! those sad forebodings were but too well founded, for the gallant officer fell in the conflict that took place on the following day at Quatre Bras, which, it may be remembered, was a prelude to the decisive battle. It was a dreadful day for poor Mary. All night she had listened with fainting heart to the fearful sounds of war-like preparation; the tramping of horses, the rumbling of baggage waggons and artillery, the mustering of soldiers in the Place Royale, and the measured tread of passing bodies of infantry, which told they were marching out of the town. But even these melancholy indications of an impending battle were as nothing compared with the terrors of the following day, when the thundering of cannon at a distance announced to the affrighted townspeople that the deadly strife had commenced.

Everybody hurried with looks of dismay to the Park, for there the noise of the distant combat was most distinctly heard, and

as it grew still louder and louder, it reached the agonized ears of the ill-fated Mary, whose heartrending shrieks were mingled with every volley, which she knew might carry with it her husband's death blow. The natural consequence of such excitement ensued ; towards night she was taken alarmingly ill, and, to add to the peril of her situation, it was found impossible to procure the aid of a doctor, for so great was the ferment that prevailed in consequence of false reports of a defeat, and an expected assault upon the city, that the inhabitants were busy in preparing for immediate flight, all being too much occupied with measures for their own safety to bestow a thought upon, or care for, their neighbour's. Any price was offered for horses and carriages to convey the fugitive population beyond reach of the dreaded danger.

The people of the house in which Mary was located, seized with the general panic, hastily packed up their most valuable effects


and fled, leaving no one with the unfortunate lady but an elderly woman—a Swiss, named Agnes Furst, who, happening to be in the house at the time, took upon herself the office of nurse, and declared she would not desert her post let what would happen.

“I cannot have the heart to leave the poor young thing alone in her trouble,” she said; “the life of an old woman like me, with neither husband nor children to fret after me, is not worth much; but this young lady’s is precious to many, and, if nobody else takes care of it, I will.”

And so, in the midst of war and tumult, exhausted by suffering and sorrow, her husband lying dead on the battle field, and no friend near her save her kind-hearted attendant, the fair young creature, who had scarcely seen twenty summers, gave birth to an orphan heir. Oh! who can calculate the misery that war entails upon mankind?—the broken hearts, the desolated homes, the ruin of bright hopes, the many years of

sorrow and of mourning that must follow every battle, whether it be lost or won? Surely, he who stirs up a needless strife will have much to answer for at the great Day of Judgment. The memorable battle that proved the harbinger of that peace which Europe so long enjoyed was fought on Sunday, the eighteenth of June; and as soon as its result was known, those who had so hastily left their domiciles in the full belief that they would be plundered and destroyed, came back well pleased to find them still standing.


Among the returning fugitives were the people of the house where poor Mary and her husband had been located, and great was their horror and astonishment on re-entering their abode to find it untenanted, except by the inanimate form of the hapless lady, which was lying on a bed, properly and carefully arranged, but unwatched and alone in the deserted dwelling. The nurse and the child were gone.



CHAPTER II.

Twenty-five years had passed away since the events related in the preceding chapter, and a new generation of the human race had sprung into being, and grown up to maturity, whilst those who had commenced life's journey before them were struggling on towards the terminus where all roads meet at last, many a one dropping by the way, too heavily laden with sickness or sorrow to complete the course. Amongst the weary travellers who were bending

under the weight of such oppressive burthens was he whom we have mentioned as Lieutenant Clement Roper, now called Mr. Roper, for it was long since he had retired from the service, and dropped his military title. The premature death of his brother, and the mysterious disappearance of the infant heir, had materially changed his position and prospects in the world, and made him what he had never expected to be, a man of fortune. Immediately after the restoration of peace, he sold his commission, and went to reside on the family estate of which he was now proprietor; and as soon as he was settled there he renewed his addresses to a young lady whose parents had some time previously rejected his suit on account of his being a younger son, with little or nothing but his profession to depend upon. The young lady herself, less worldly minded, would have accepted him, even under these disadvantageous circumstances, had she been at liberty to act



according to her own inclinations; and as Clement Roper was fully aware of this flattering truth, and was, moreover, very much in love, he forgave the former slight, repeated his offer, was accepted, and married the object of his affections. Yet, with all these causes for happiness, he was far from being a happy man. The exuberant flow of spirits that used to distinguish him at an earlier period of life had totally subsided, and given place to a degree of gloom and abstractedness for which there was no apparent reason; so that at eight and twenty, in possession of all that the world deems necessary to make life enjoyable, he was a moody, melancholy man. The change was certainly observed by his wife, but she was one of those devoted mothers who give up their time and thoughts so entirely to their children that they have little leisure to watch their husband's peculiarities; and as he was always kind and indulgent to her, she was content to believe that he was naturally

of a sombre disposition, and, in course of time, ceased to remember that he had ever been other than he then was. But there was one person who was more clear-sighted as to the difference between natural temperament and mental disquietude. This was Dr. Courtland, formerly an army surgeon attached to the same regiment as Lieutenant Roper, who had been on intimate terms with him during the whole of his military career. He left the army, and purchased a practice at Derby about the same time that Roper came to reside at Newborough Hall; and in consequence of this proximity the intimacy was continued, and Mr. Courtland—for he had not then taken his degree as M.D.—became the medical attendant of Mr. Roper's family. Unfortunately there was but too much occasion for his services, for, of ten children, the unhappy parents, at the time of which we are now speaking, had only one remaining to them, three having died in childhood,

and the rest—smitten by the withering hand of that cruel foe to the natives of this country, consumption—had successively grown up to an age when youth is loveliest, then faded, drooped, and passed from earth to heaven ere they had gathered the flowers of eighteen summers. These sad bereavements increased the dejection of the miserable father to a most alarming extent, inso-much that fears were entertained of his intellect becoming disordered, for he would sit for hours silently brooding over his sorrows, and answer impatiently, even fiercely, anyone who attempted to offer him consolation.

There was but one individual towards whom he never displayed signs either of impatience or irritability, and that was Henry his only surviving son, who had reached his twenty-first year, apparently in good health, so that his parents were sanguine in their hopes that he, at least, would be spared to them.

People had begun to talk of the festivities that were to celebrate the coming of age of the young squire, an event that was looked forward to with the most pleasing anticipations. But, alas! some months before the time arrived, symptoms of the fatal malady began to exhibit themselves, and Dr. Courtland was once more called in, and again, as in former cases, he said—"You had better take him to a warmer climate." The very words sounded to the afflicted sire as his son's death warrant, for twice the remedy had been tried, and in both instances it had failed.

"I will not—I will not!" he exclaimed, wringing his hands in all the agony of despair. "If my boy must die, he shall die here at his own home, and not among strangers. Two of them already lie buried in a foreign land, and now I am to lose the last. Oh, my God! my God! This is a just retribution!"

The last words had escaped him uncon-

sciously ; he did not know he had uttered them, so entirely was every faculty absorbed in the intensity of his grief ; but the doctor had heard them distinctly enough, and they brought back to his mind certain circumstances which had occurred in days long gone by. He pondered over them as he returned homewards. "A just retribution!"—it was thus his ideas shaped themselves—"that must have some meaning!—people don't say those things at random. Now let me recollect—it is really so long ago that I have almost forgotten how it was, but there certainly was a suspicion afloat at the time of something not quite right. Let me see—his brother, the captain, was killed, I think, in that affair at Quatre Bras, and, if I remember rightly, there was a child born the same night or the day after, and nobody knew what became of it. Now that child would have inherited all this property, and in that case our friend Roper here had very little prospect but to retire upon half-pay.

It has an ugly look, that's certain ; however, it is no business of mine that I know of ; it rests between him and his conscience. Besides, it is only a surmise, after all ; and I should be sorry to breathe a suspicion of the kind to any human being. We are all a little too apt to be hard in our judgment of each other. God keep us out of the way of temptation, that's all." And with this charitable feeling towards the sins of his neighbours, the worthy doctor alighted at the door of his own house.

Henry Roper became gradually worse : his cough was more hollow, he grew weaker every day, while the unnatural brightness of his eyes and the hectic colour on his check were unmistakeable signs of the enemy that had marked him for its prey. Perfectly aware of his own condition, he looked forward to the end with piety and resignation, for he had always been of a serious, reflecting turn of mind, and instead of seeking to blind himself to the almost certain result of

his disease, he began quietly to prepare for his entrance into another and a better world. Happy are they who, even in youth, while the pleasures of this life are yet new and dear to them, can look up to heaven with a cheerful, trusting heart, and say, "Father, I am ready, if it be thy will to call me hence!" Still, he never spoke of dying, for he knew it was a painful theme to all he loved; but his profound meditations, the books he chose for constant reading, together with his whole demeanor, plainly showed that his thoughts were continually bent upon the coming change.

"Henry," his mother ventured to say one day, when she found him sitting at a table, with a large volume open before him, his head leaning on his hand as if engaged in deep thought—"Henry, do you not think a little lighter reading occasionally would be a relief, and serve to amuse you?"

"It is not amusement I am seeking, dear mother," he replied, raising his eyes to hers

with a peculiar, yet tranquil smile, that seemed to say, "What have I to do with the things of this earth?"

She understood the look, and burst into tears, on which he rose, with more agitation than he usually exhibited—.

"Mother! mother! why is this?"

She held out her arms, and he threw himself into them. For a few moments both were silent; then Henry, recovering his wonted calmness, said—

"Dearest mother, this is no cause for sorrow; some must go before others, and I am content that my pilgrimage should be a short one, since all I read tends to convince me that the joys of this life are few in comparison with its afflictions."

"True, my son," replied the sobbing lady; "yet I cannot think that we must part so soon—God is merciful."

"Yes," he replied, "merciful in either case; so now let us say no more of this, for

"I see it distresses you far more than it need."

He pressed his lips tenderly to her cheek and left the room, desirous of putting an end to a conversation that was too exciting for both of them ; nor was it ever afterwards alluded to by either. In the meantime, Dr. Courtland had been called away to London to give his professional assistance to a veteran General whom he had known when he was in the army.

This old gentleman, whose name was Merryfield, looked upon doctors generally as a pernicious set of beings, given to the destruction of the human race ; for he had never been ill in his life, and he attributed his good luck in that particular to the fact of having never taken a dose of medicine, declaring it to be his firm belief that all mixtures, pills, and draughts, were but so many varieties of poison. It happened, however, just about this time, that he had an attack of rheumatic gout, which had

more effect in overcoming his prejudices against the medical faculty than the most powerful arguments that could have been adduced. Confined to his bed, and suffering from pain, he consented to send for his old acquaintance, Dr. Courtland, who had once dressed a slight wound for him in a very skilful manner, and won his good opinion on that occasion by giving him no physic.

So the Doctor went to town and took up his abode, by special invitation, at his patient's house, which, as General Merryfield was a widower, was kept by his daughter, a widow lady, with two remarkably pretty children, who were the idols of the grandfather's heart. Dr. Courtland met with a very cordial reception; the General took the remedies he prescribed, grew rapidly better, and in a few days was able to leave his room; but as his health improved, his scepticism, with regard to the efficacy of drugs, returned, and he stoutly

affirmed that he should have recovered just as soon without taking anything at all.

"Then why did you send for me, General?" said the Doctor, laughing.

"Oh, for old friendship's sake. It was a good excuse to get your company for a few days, and I knew that would do me good. You will not be in a hurry to leave me, I hope?"

"Why, I am afraid if I go at present, you will be doing some imprudent thing that may cause a relapse; besides, I have half promised Mrs. Phillips to sit for my portrait to a German artist that she seems interested about."

"You mean Martin Furst; yes, she has taken a great fancy to him, and a very nice young fellow he is; extremely clever too, they say, but we have had no opportunity yet of judging of his ability."

"I understood he had taken likenesses of your grandsons."

"So he has, and the sketches were good,

but you had better not decide upon employing him till you have seen the pictures; they will probably be finished to-day or to-morrow."

Scarcely had the General given this prudent piece of advice to his physician, when a servant came to say that Mr. Furst had brought home the drawings.

"Is your mistress at home?" asked the General.

"No, sir; she is out with the young gentlemen."

"Then show Mr. Furst up here. Now, doctor, you will see what he can do!"

"Exactly, and I shall make up my mind accordingly."

The young artist entered the room, and Dr. Courtland could scarcely suppress an exclamation of surprise, for the face and figure of the young man were quite familiar to him, although he could not remember when or where he had met with him before. It was a remarkable face, too, for the eyes

were very large, dark, and brilliant, the forehead was high and white, and the mouth had rather a haughty expression, which was not concealed even by the pleasant smile of gratification with which he received the compliments of General Merryfield on his performances.

"They are capital likenesses, indeed, and very fine pictures, too; you bid fair to become a first-rate artist, Mr. Furst; what say you, Doctor?"

"Very good—very good, indeed," replied the Doctor, with rather an absent air, as if his mind was otherwise engaged.

"Why, what's the matter with you, man? what are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking that I have certainly seen that young gentleman before. May I ask, if you have been long in England, Mr. Furst?"

"Not long, sir; it is only three months that I am arrived here!"

"And you have not been in this country before?"

"I have not been in England till now. It is a fine country!"

"I am glad you think so. Were you born in Germany?"

"No, sir. I was born in Brussels, and brought up in Switzerland; but it is five years that I have lived in Germany, at Stuttgard."

Dr. Courtland asked no more questions; but, at the mention of Brussels, a sudden light had broken in upon him, that made him desirous of learning something more of the young man's family history.

"I was at Stuttgard, once," he said, "but it is many years ago—and now let us proceed to business. I have made a foolish promise to my better half, that I will give her the opportunity of disfiguring our dining room with a *fac simile* of my ugly physiognomy, and I think I cannot do better than let you make the best you can of it." Then

seeing that the foreigner looked as if he did not quite comprehend all the points of this speech, he enlightened him by adding—
“In plain language, Mr. Furst, will you do me the favour to paint my portrait?”

“*Ah ! oui, monsieur !* I shall have much pleasure. It will be a great happiness for me.” And his large, lustrous eyes beamed with delight.

“Will it? Then we may as well set to work at once. But there does not seem to be a very good light here. Where shall we go, General?”

“Furst will show you where he had the boys—it is the little room by the side of the library; and I will finish my newspaper the while.”

The artist and his new subject retired to the little studio thus indicated, and whilst the former was preparing his sketching materials, Dr. Courtland contrived to elicit some further information that almost con-

firmed him in a suspicion which had taken possession of his mind.

"You say you were born at Brussels," he began. "I was there with the army at the time of the Battle of Waterloo, and, if I judge your age rightly, that must have been about the date of your birth."

"You are right. I was born the day before that battle."

"Indeed! Your parents were Belgians, perhaps?"

"No, sir. They were English."

"Yet Furst is not an English name."

"That was not the name of my parents," replied the young man, a look of sadness stealing over his fine features, as he busied himself in selecting crayons for his task.

The Doctor hesitated between his desire to hear more, and his fear of being considered impertinently curious, but at length he said, "I feel I have no right, as a stranger, to intrude upon your confidence,

but will you allow me to ask whether your father was in the army?"

"Yes. He was a British officer."

"And his name ——"

"Would to God I could tell it you!" exclaimed the young man, with a sudden burst of emotion. "I have never known it myself. I was an orphan in my first hour—my father was killed in some action two days before the grand battle, and my mother died almost on the instant I was born."

"Merciful Providence! thy ways are wonderful!" murmured the Doctor. "And who took charge of the infant?" he inquired, with a look and tone of such deep interest, that the young man was induced to throw aside his reserve, and tell all he knew of his own history. This, however, was but little.

"He was brought up," he said, "at a small village in one of the Swiss cantons, by a poor woman who was with his mother in her last moments, and had always taken

pains to instil into his mind that he was a gentleman's child, and superior to the other boys of the village. She had often related to him the melancholy circumstances that attended his birth, and that she was left alone in a house, from which the inhabitants had fled in terror, with the dead lady and the newborn babe. That after the battle, one of the English officers had come there and desired her to take the child to a small town some way from Brussels, promising that he would take care it should be provided for, and that he fulfilled his promise by raising a subscription amongst the officers of the father's regiment for its maintenance. She used to speak," the young man continued, "in high terms of this benevolent gentleman, whose name was Parkinson ; he was a captain, but I have not been able to find him, though I have made much search. The good woman, my nurse, did not learn the name of my father, so I have never known it, but am always called by her

name, which was Furst. Captain Parkinson, she said, told her it would be best to call me so; he gave her the money he had been so kind to collect, and sent her with me back to her native village, and she took very great care of me ever, and obtained many good friends for me. One of them was a German painter, who taught me his art. When my nurse died, five years ago, I went to Stuttgard, where I remained till I came to England; and all the time I have been here I have made inquiry for Captain Parkinson, but have not had success."

This little narrative being concluded, Dr. Courtland thanked the young man for his frankness, at the same time promising to assist him in his endeavours to trace out his family; but he said not a word of his own ideas on that subject, although he had scarcely a doubt remaining that he had discovered the lost heir of his old friend, Captain Roper. The extraordinary resemblance of the young artist to that unfortu-

nate officer was, in itself, strong evidence of the truth of the supposition ; and as every other circumstance tended to corroborate that testimony, he came at length to the conclusion that it was so, and determined to act accordingly.

CHAPTER III.

Martin Furst was poor—so poor that he could afford no better lodging than a back room on the second floor of a small house at Camden Town. But as he was too proud to publish his straitened circumstances to the world, and was in the habit of dining out every day at a late hour, his landlady had no suspicion of the actual state of his finances, and treated him with the utmost civility and attention; but if that worthy person had known where and

at how little cost her handsome lodger dined, it is highly probable that she might not have been so profuse of her courtesies, or so amiable in her form of speech as she always took care to be. There was a certain ease of manner about the artist which, together with the elegance of his person and his habit of paying the trifling demands upon his purse without question, kept up his character as a gentleman upon very slender means indeed. He was fond of his profession, and being blessed with a hopeful disposition, did not suffer present poverty to damp his energies or depress his spirits, for he was under an erroneous impression that in England talent is a sure road to fame and fortune—a pleasant dream enough, but very seldom realized. It was by mere chance he had obtained an introduction to General Merryfield, who met with him in a printseller's shop, where he was offering some drawings for sale, and, being pleased with his manners and com-

versation, engaged him to take the likenesses of his two grandchildren—an accidental circumstance that led to more important results than he could possibly have anticipated. Still he felt happy in having met with two such excellent patrons as the General and Dr. Courtland, and set about the new work he had undertaken with the most sanguine expectations of future wealth and eminence.

In the meanwhile Dr. Courtland was anxiously considering what would be the best and wisest course for him to pursue in an affair of so difficult and delicate a nature. There was a duty to be performed, an unpleasant one, certainly, as regarded his old and hitherto highly respected friend; yet he resolved not to shrink from it, for the more he reflected on the extraordinary manner in which he had arrived at a knowledge of the truth, the more firm became his conviction that Providence had destined him to be the means of restoring

the injured heir to his inheritance. After much grave deliberation he at length decided on his plan of action; and as the General was now well enough to be left with perfect safety, he pleaded the necessity of returning as soon as possible to his country patients as an excuse for shortening his visit, and invited the artist to go down with him into Derbyshire and finish his picture there, an invitation that was joyfully accepted.

It was the latter end of May, and wanted only three weeks of the time when Henry Roper would be of age. By a singular coincidence his birthday was on the same day, and in the same month, as that of Martin Furst, the seventeenth of June; but the latter was four years older, being in his twenty-fifth year. Dr. Courtland was aware of this fact, and it seemed to him another link in the chain that was leading to events in which he found himself so strangely involved; yet not even to his wife did he

confide the reasons that had induced him to invite the artist to his house, for although he had that unbounded confidence which every husband, as a matter of course, ought to have in the discretion of his fair partner, he considered it safer to act upon the general principle that a secret needs but one keeper. The lady, however, was delighted with her guest, and performed the rites of hospitality with a grace that made him feel perfectly at home in a very short time.

On the day after his arrival, Dr. Courtland went to pay his customary visit at Newborough Hall, where he found the invalid just as he had expected to find him, visibly nearer the end of his pilgrimage on earth than when he had last seen him.

“What do you think of my poor boy, Doctor?” asked the heartbroken father.

“All things are possible with God,” was the solemn, the hopeless reply.

Both were silent for some moments ; then

Dr. Courtland said, gently, "Mr. Roper, I think you have no portrait of your son."

The tone in which this observation was made seemed to convey this meaning—"it would be a consolation to you when he is gone"—and the unhappy father evidently understood it so, for the tears rolled down his cheeks as he replied, "Yes, you are right—but how is it to be done?"

"That might be easily managed, for I have brought down a foreign artist with me, a young man from Switzerland—(he purposely avoided mentioning the name)—who would take an excellent likeness at one sitting, so that it would be no fatigue to our poor patient, but might rather serve to amuse him. Shall we try it?"

"It shall be as he likes. You can ask him, if you will."

Henry received the proposition with a faint smile, for he perfectly comprehended its import, but he offered no opposition, and the following day was fixed for

the introduction of Martin Furst to his unknown relatives.

Dr. Courtland passed an anxious, sleepless night; but he was a man firm of purpose, and as he had decided in his own mind that the existence of the true heir had better be made known at once, he was resolved to go through the task he had imposed upon himself, painful as he felt it to be.

It was a splendid morning, warm and sunny, but not sultry; the sky was intensely blue, and not the slightest shadow of a cloud was discernible on its vast expanse, when he and his *protege* entered the gates of Newborough Park and walked towards the house through a fine avenue formed by two lines of stately oaks and elms, which the young man, who viewed them with an artist's eye, called grand and magnificent.

"How should you like to be the owner of a place like this, Furst?"

"Ah! Too much happiness. If I should

paint pictures all my life I could not buy so much as one row of these noble trees."

The Doctor smiled at the enthusiastic admiration expressed by his young friend of objects in which he had unconsciously so deep an interest; and he said to himself, "How little he suspects they are all his own."

On reaching the house they were shown at once into the library, where Mr. Roper was sitting alone, engaged in writing. His countenance was pale and dejected, and his voice trembled as he returned the greeting of his friend, who, after the usual salutation of the morning, said—

"Permit me to introduce to you this young gentleman, Mr. Furst."

At the mention of that name Mr. Roper gave an involuntary start, for he remembered it well, and, turning his eyes towards the stranger, uttered a piercing cry and fell back in a fainting fit. The Doctor rang the bell and called for water; but in a few

moments the wretched man opened his eyes and stared wildly about him.

"You had better go and walk about the grounds for a little while, Furst," said the Doctor; "his nerves are so shattered he can hardly bear the sight of a stranger. I will come to you presently."

The young man left the room in some surprise, not able to account for the sensation his appearance seemed to produce; and as soon as he was gone Mr. Roper seized the Doctor's arm and said in a voice scarcely audible—

"Who is he?—where did he come from?—why have you brought him here?"


"Calm yourself, and I will explain all," replied the Doctor. "He was born at Brussels, and has come from Switzerland. You are struck, I see, with the resemblance, as I was myself."

"Then it is he—it is the injured son of my departed brother! Oh, Dr. Courtland—I have been a sinful man! but I have

been grievously and justly punished." And he covered his face with his hands and wept bitterly. How vain is the attempt to secure happiness by doing wrong! The immediate object may indeed be gained, but can the means be obliterated from the mind? Will they not haunt the evildoer like spectres in the night, turning all that ought to be sweet in life to bitterness, and casting a dark shadow over the bright things of the earth?

The kindhearted Doctor allowed the excited feelings of the penitent to exhaust themselves in some degree before he entered into any further explanation; but when he saw him sufficiently composed to hear what he had to tell he related all that the artist had told him respecting his birth, the lamentable fate of his parents, and the manner in which he was placed under the care of the good woman who performed the part of a mother to him.

These details were listened to by the guilty man with profound silence, nor did



he utter a word or raise his eyes from the ground for a long time after the narrator had ceased speaking. At last he said in a low, half suffocated voice—

“I am ready to make what atonement I can.”

“I know it,” replied the Doctor, grasping his hand with friendly warmth. “I have but one question to ask you, and then I shall understand it all. Was it you who visited the nurse, Agnes Furst, under the name of Captain Parkinson?”

“It was—it was. God forgive me! I gave her the money to take the child out of the way. Oh! what years of misery has that accursed act entailed upon me! I have never known a moment's peace since I took possession of this ill-gotten property. If he who contemplates a crime did but know the sorrow and remorse that must follow, how many wicked deeds would be left undone.”

“True, my friend, and you must be thankful that the opportunity is mercifully

given you to atone for your error and make restitution."

"I am thankful. Heaven is my witness that I am ——, but, my poor boy ——"

"It will not affect him, Mr. Roper; his mind must not be disturbed by this discovery; therefore, at present, everything had better go on just as it is."

"Arrange it as you will. I am content to be guided by your advice."

"Then suppose I keep the young gentleman with me for a few weeks as Martin Furst, the artist; and let him take the portrait as we intended. It may be as well, perhaps, to gain some knowledge of his character before we act in this matter at all." And so it was decided.

The seventeenth of June came round again, and Martin Furst was putting the finishing touch to his picture, when a message was brought from the Hall, requesting Dr. Courtland's immediate attendance.

"I expected this," he said. "I saw yesterday that it would be so. And he is of age to-day, too. Poor fellow—it is a strange fatality."

The event he had foreseen took place. Before he reached the mansion, all was over, and the innocent, unconscious usurper of another's rights was peacefully sleeping his last sleep, happy in being spared the knowledge of his own false position.

"Mr. Furst," said Dr. Courtland that same evening, "the seventeenth of June is destined to be a memorable day in your history. Twenty-five years ago, on that day, you began your life without friends, without a name, and without an inheritance; but Providence has ordained that the same day which deprived you of those rights shall restore them to you, and it is my mission to make you acquainted with your real name and parentage. You are the nephew of Mr. Roper, and the rightful

heir of Newborough Hall, and I have now only to entreat your pardon for keeping you so long in ignorance of the truth."

It would be impossible to describe the astonishment of the artist at this unexpected revelation, and the sudden change in his fortunes; yet, with the generous feelings of a young and ardent mind, his first impulse was to pour forth the most sincere expressions of sorrow for the death of his cousin, and regret that he had not known him as a relative.

"If he had lived," he said, "we should have been brothers, and shared the estate between us."

The funeral of Henry Roper was conducted with strict privacy; no vain show, no empty parade, accompanied his mortal remains to their final resting place. His father and newly discovered kinsman were the chief mourners, and from that time the latter assumed his real name, and took up

his abode at Newborough Hall; but no arguments could prevail upon him to supersede his uncle, who repeatedly declared himself ready and willing to resign the estate at once. All that the noble spirited young man desired was, he said, to be treated as a son, and looked upon as the future heir, nor did he ever utter a single word in allusion to the wrongs he had sustained. That secret was faithfully kept by Dr. Courtland, so that the world attributed the long estrangement of the heir to the accidents arising out of the confusion that prevailed in the neighbourhood of the great battle at the time of his birth.

Mrs. Roper did not long survive her son, whose place to her the stranger could not supply, amiable and high-minded as he was. After her death, the uncle and nephew continued to live together on the most amicable terms; and when time had healed the wounds inflicted by so long a series of do-

mestic calamities, Mr. Roper was a happier man than he had ever been since that inauspicious hour when, dazzled by the pomps and vanities of the world, he was tempted to usurp the patrimony of the orphan heir.

THE END.

THE

CHRISTMAS DINNER.




THE

CHRISTMAS DINNER.


CHAPTER I.

It was the week before Christmas, and great preparations were being made in the house of Mr. Bartlet, a solicitor, residing in one of our large country towns—which may as well be called Middleburn—for the celebration of that joyous season. The elder daughters had been very busy for several days in manufacturing glittering trifles to adorn a Christmas tree; and Mr. Malcolm Bartlet, the only son, and eldest of the family, was exercising his artistic talents in



painting scenes, and converting a spacious room at the top of the house—which was used as a general receptacle for old books, papers, and everything that had no place elsewhere—into a temporary theatre, as the festivities in contemplation were to include a popular comedy, to be acted by the young people and some of their friends, on New Year's-eve.

It would have been difficult to find, throughout all England, a happier or more affectionate family than the Bartlets. Mr. Bartlet was not a rich man, but he was far from being a needy one ; and, as he liked his own home and the society of his wife and children better than any other pleasures the world could afford him, he was always good-humoured amongst them, and his presence consequently added so much to their enjoyments, that even his short absences, when obliged to go to London on business, cast a shade of dullness for the time over the little circle of which he was the centre,



that spoke volumes for his kindliness as a domestic man. It was on one of these occasions that the whole family was assembled round the breakfast table at an earlier hour than usual on the morning in question, for he was going off by the ten o'clock train, and did not expect to return for three days, having a great deal of business to transact in London for the Right Hon. Lord De Vere, as that nobleman, who possessed landed property in various parts of England, lived chiefly on the continent, and Mr. Bartlet was his agent.

"What a bustle there seems to be in the town!" observed Laura, the second daughter, a fine girl, about seventeen; "there must surely be something the matter."

And, as she spoke, she rose and went to the window.

"What is it, Laura?" said her father, drawing towards him, as he spoke, a pigeon pie, which his wife was at that moment recommending as an excellent preparative

for a long journey ; “is there a wedding going forward, that you are so mightily interested ?”

“I don’t know, papa, but there certainly is a great confusion in the street.”

“There always is on a market day, my dear,” said the mother. “We are earlier with our breakfast this morning ; so we see more of it than we do in general.”

“I think it must be more than that, mamma, for everybody seems to be running down towards the Crown and Sceptre, and there is quite a crowd collected there.”

Just at this instant three or four horsemen gallopped past at full speed, and immediately afterwards a carriage drove at a furious rate, as if it were going on an errand of life and death.

“That is Sir James Gordon’s carriage,” said Marian, the eldest daughter, who had followed her sister to the window. “And—oh ! Laura—look at all those poor peo-

ple; I am sure something very dreadful has happened."

A number of working men were, in fact, hurrying along the street, with terror in their looks, followed by several women, who appeared to be crying bitterly.

"I shouldn't wonder if it isn't a railway accident," said Malcolm, who was now looking out—"I will just run down to the station and see."

He was leaving the room for that purpose, when he encountered the man-servant at the door, looking as if he had something wonderful to tell.

"Well, Miles, is anything the matter?"

"Yes, sir; there's a terrible stir in the town—the people are flocking in from far and near; they say as how the bank has stopped."

"How! what! the bank stopped! What do you mean, man?" exclaimed Mr. Bartlet, starting from his seat with such a look of dismay, that the informant retreated a few

steps in evident alarm at the effect of his communication, whilst Mrs. Bartlet put down the cup of coffee she was raising to her lips, and gazed at her husband with astonishment and terror.

“What do you mean?” he repeated, grasping the back of a chair to save himself from falling, for he trembled from head to foot.

The man looked from one to the other as if afraid to tell his tale; till he was encouraged by his mistress, who said, gently—

“Why don’t you speak, Miles? Tell your master what has happened.”

“Why, ma’am, Tom Page has just come in, all of a fluster like, and he says as how the bank is shut up, and there’s a mob round the doors, and they’re knocking and ringing like mad—and nobody can’t get in; and he’s in a sad way, for he’s got fifteen pounds there, and they tell him he won’t get a farthing, for that the head partner’s

gone off with all the money, and that Mr. Torren's has shot himself."

At this point of the recital, Mr. Bartlet uttered a deep groan, and, with a face pale as death, rushed out of the room, pushing the man aside as he passed him, and the next minute was seen walking rapidly down the street without his great coat, although the snow was falling fast, and the cold intense.

"What can this mean?" said Mrs. Bartlet, addressing her son.

"I cannot understand it," Malcolm replied, "he has never been in the habit of keeping any very large sum there, and it was but yesterday he told me his balance was less than usual."

"Yes; I know that it was not forty pounds three days ago—that cannot be it; but I remember he said last night he should have to call at the banker's before he went to town, and that it was fortunate it was market morning, as they began business an

hour earlier, so that he might still get off by ten o'clock."

A new light flashed upon Malcolm at these words. He knew that his father had been entrusted with the sale of an estate for Lord De Vere, and that the purchase money was to be paid into the Bank of England as soon as he received it. He knew, too, that the purchaser had been with Mr. Bartlet for a considerable time on the day but one before, and it struck him that the money might have been paid then, and that his father had, for his own convenience, left it at the banker's instead of taking it at once to London, according to the instructions he had received.

So strong was the conviction on the mind of the young man that he involuntarily exclaimed—

"Yes; it must be so!"

"What must be so, Malcolm? Have you thought of anything that may account for your father's agitation?"

"I fear I can account for it but too well, mother; however, I will soon know the truth. Heaven grant I may be mistaken!"

And he was going towards the door, but the lady stopped him.

"What is it, my son? Tell me what you think; for this suspense is more terrible than the worst certainty. What is it that you fear?"

"The purchase-money for Newton Burrows."

"Good God! has he received it?"

"I am afraid it was paid the day before yesterday."

"And that he placed it there till he went to town?" she asked, almost breathless with alarm.

"Just so."


"It would be ruin, Malcolm?"

"It would, indeed," replied the young man, sorrowfully; and without another word he put on his hat, and went to seek his father.

The snow was now descending in thick flakes, and Mrs. Bartlet remembered that her husband had gone out without any of his customary outer wrappings. Miles was therefore interrupted in the midst of an eloquent harangue which he was putting forth in the kitchen—touching the uncertainty of human events, as illustrated by the loss of fifteen pounds on the part of his particular friend, Tom Page, owing to the unexpected failure of the Middleburn bank—by the ringing of the parlour bell.

“Take your master’s great coat down to the bank, Miles, and see that he puts it on; this scarf, too, to wrap round his neck, and his woollen gloves. And you had better take him an umbrella. Go as quick as you can.”

Glad of an excuse to see what was going on, and as he had no money himself at stake, feeling rather disposed to enjoy the scene than otherwise, Miles obeyed the orders of his mistress with more alacrity



than he usually displayed on any occasion demanding bodily exertion, being one of those individuals who are naturally inclined to get through the world with as little trouble as possible. Nevertheless, he liked, in common with the generality of mankind, to look upon the ills that touched him not—a species of gratification difficult to account for, yet it must be confessed that few of us are wholly exempt from a certain degree of capability for such enjoyment.

As soon as the man was gone, Marian came from the window and sat down by her mother, who was very pale but quite calm.

“Do you think Malcolm is right, mamma?”

“It seems but too probable Marian. I am afraid, indeed, that it must be so; but whatever happens, I do entreat you both, my dear children, to make no display of grief, but exert yourselves under any circumstances to strengthen and console your

father ; for if this should be as there seems reason to believe, he will need all the consolation we can give him."

"Is it not possible," Laura suggested, with tears in her eyes, "that his distress is on account of somebody else? It may have nothing to do with his own affairs, after all."

The idea was eagerly adopted by the others ; and to this forlorn hope they clung, as the drowning man, they say, will catch at a floating straw. At length Malcolm came back, not with his usual buoyant step and happy smile, but so utterly dejected that every hope of the calamity being less than he had anticipated vanished at the first sight of his troubled countenance.

"Where is your father, Malcolm?" Mrs. Bartlet asked, with trembling lips.

"He will be here soon," was the reply, in a voice so changed that the girls uttered a simultaneous cry, so hollow and despairing was its tone.

"Is it as you suspected?" faltered Marian.

"It is," he answered, and sinking into a chair he covered his face with his hands, as if to hide the tears of which he was ashamed, though he could not restrain them. For some time no one ventured to break the mournful silence. At length, with a sudden burst of passionate feeling, Malcolm cried out—

"Mother! mother! how will you be able to bear this blow?"

"With patience, I trust, my beloved son. What is the amount?"

"Fifteen thousand pounds."

"Fifteen thousand!" she repeated, faintly. She knew well that all they possessed in the world would be insufficient to realize such a sum, and the shock was almost too much to conceal; but nerving herself as well as she could, she said, quietly, "It is a hard trial, but it will fall on us all alike. We must try to lighten it to each other,

and more particularly to your father, who will feel it the most. It is our duty now, dear Malcolm, to forget our own troubles, and do our best to make this misfortune less burdensome to him that he may not sink under it.

Her words were not scattered to the winds, they found an echo in the bosoms of her children, who responded in the same spirit; and thus the withdrawal of Fortune's sunny beams left the bright star of domestic affection to exhibit itself in all its beautiful brilliancy.

The calamitous state of affairs as regarded the firm of Galt and Torrens had, as usual, been much exaggerated. That they had stopped payment was true enough, but nobody knew under what circumstances, or how far they were insolvent. Mr. Galt had certainly not gone off with all the money, as reported, neither had Mr. Torrens shot himself; but the former was sojourning at an hotel in London, in a very

quiet, private way, spending the greater part of his time in writing letters, and holding consultations with men of business ; whilst the latter, instead of betaking himself to the next world in such a hasty, uncomfortable manner, was more pleasantly, as well as more advantageously, employing himself in this, by making an excellent breakfast, in company with the chief clerk, in an apartment at the back of the house, where the noise of the multitude did not disturb him, both gentlemen being deeply engaged in the contemplation of long columns of numerical figures, that appeared to engross all their attention. The clamour outside might be attributed to the following causes. The house of Galt and Torrens had, from time immemorial, been in the habit of receiving small deposits at a certain rate of interest from the market people, and others of that class, many of whom, even after the institution of savings banks, continued to carry their little savings to the old

place, which they looked upon as a sort of strong fortress, and as numbers of them, especially among the women, were impressed with a vague notion that the identical coins they had taken there to be securely guarded, were locked up in boxes under the counter, they believed that, if they could but gain admittance, they should be able to enforce restitution, unless Mr. Galt had really absconded with their property. But it was not the riotous portion of the sufferers that had the most claim to sympathy and compassion. Some there were whose silent tears, and looks of utter hopeless misery were heart-rending to behold; yet, in many cases, the loss of these unfortunates did not exceed ten pounds, perhaps were even under that sum. There was one poor woman who, for a very long period, had brought butter to the market once a week. By dint of a careful economy, she had saved up, literally by pence and halfpence, a little fortune of

twelve pounds in as many years, and to her it seemed a mine of wealth inexhaustible, a treasure on which she could rely for comfort when a time of sickness or trouble should come. The pride she had felt in seeing her store increase, and converting by slow degrees her pence into silver, her silver into gold, was now a bitter remembrance, and she sat with her face buried in her apron all day long, on a step opposite the house, vainly hoping the doors would open at last ; but when the shades of evening darkened around her, and they still were closed, she went away to her home quite broken-hearted.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Bartlet had hitherto been a prosperous man, and he had deserved to be so, for he was industrious, persevering, clever in his profession, strictly honourable, and not expensive in his habits. Then, in addition to these qualifications for success in the world, he was fortunate enough to have a wife who was always ready to second his views, and content to live within the limits of his income. In the earlier years of their marriage that income was a very narrow

one indeed ; but then they spent no money in Continental trips, gave no dinner parties, drank no wine, and kept only one servant. But the time when prudence required such self-denial had long since passed away, and the Bartlets, as their children grew up, were able to take their month or six weeks at the sea-side, as others did, and entertain their friends hospitably, without inconvenience. Then everybody said, "Bartlet has been a fortunate man." It would have been more correct to say, "Bartlet has been a wise and a prudent man."

His family now consisted of one son, the eldest of all, and five daughters, three of whom were yet but children. Malcolm, who chose to follow his father's profession, had been articled to a Mr. Perrin, a highly respectable solicitor in London, whose son, a youth about his own age, was his school-fellow ; and, as they had always been great friends, Mr. Perrin did not object to receive young Bartlet into his house as well as his

office, and he was treated in the family as another son. The Perrins had no daughters, but Mrs. Perrin was very fond of having young ladies staying with her, a pleasant arrangement of course to the two young men, who lost no time in selecting their respective idols. The choice of Malcolm Bartlet fell upon Emma Ray, a very sweet girl indeed, whose soft blue eyes and sunny smiles shed a new and beautiful light around him, that made the world all *couleur de rose*. He soon contrived to ascertain that he did not adore in vain ; but as the fair Emma was only nineteen, and he had still a year to remain with Mr. Perrin, it was agreed between them that nothing should be said to the young lady's parents of their mutual attachment, till Malcolm was a free man, when his proposal would come with a better grace, and be more likely to meet with a favourable reception. Mr. and Mrs. Perrin were by no means blind to what was going on, but they liked young Bartlet, and were


rather disposed to promote the affair than otherwise, so they shut their eyes, and let things take their course.

The year passed away like a blissful dream. There were frequent little evening parties arranged by the amiable lady of the house, with music and polkas, and all that sort of thing, so delightful to lovers, till, at length, the time came for Malcolm to take a higher position in the world. He was then about two and twenty, handsome and prepossessing in his general appearance, gentlemanlike in manners, clever, high-spirited, and of a generous open-hearted disposition. He had already obtained his father's consent to propose for the hand of Miss Ray, and also a promise that at the end of six months he should have a share of the business, which was in a more flourishing state than it had ever been before. Furnished with such satisfactory credentials, the ardent lover felt sufficient courage to lay his proposal in form before Mr. Ray,

who was a medical practitioner of some eminence, and noted as being one of the proudest and most pompous men in the whole city of London. But he was not rich, for—like many professional men—he considered it necessary to live in a certain style, which involved the expenditure of his utmost income; therefore, although Emma was his only child, he made less objection than might have been expected to the young lawyer's offer, and, after some correspondence with Mr. Bartlet senior, condescended to give his consent, taking especial care to let it be known that he did consider it a condescension. As to Mrs. Ray, she was nobody in the affair. Her husband's will was always law to her; and being one of those apathetic persons who take everything easy, and concern themselves as little as possible about what is passing around them, she assented to her daughter's marriage with the same indifference that she would have expressed opposi-

tion to it, had such been the will and pleasure of her liege lord. This compliance was neither the effect of fear nor of affection, but simply a habit arising from the fact that it was less trouble to agree in opinion with an arbitrary person, than to contest any point whatsoever. So Malcolm returned to his home, happy in the present, happy in the future. But his happiness, according to the fashion that has prevailed since the days of Adam and Eve, had its drawback, which, in this case, was furnished by the fact that his sister Marian—his favourite sister—was engaged, and about to enter, shortly, the holy and honourable estate of matrimony. Not that he objected to the circumstance itself, for he thought it was the best thing in the world to be married ; but he was of opinion that she had fixed on the wrong man, and that was what annoyed him. The gentleman in question was Mr. Percy Beckwith, an engineer, and the son of Dr. Beckwith, the greatest physician in Middle-

burn. Now Malcolm did not like young Beckwick ; but whether it was because he did not think very highly of his character, or whether he was prejudiced against him on account of one he would infinitely have preferred as a brother-in-law, might, perhaps, at that time, admit of a doubt. Marian, of course, inclined towards the latter view of the case, and, for her sake, he tried to overcome his dislike ; still, he could not help looking rather coldly on the intended husband of his beautiful and beloved sister, in consequence of which Mr. Beckwith treated him with a degree of *hauteur* that was not likely to place them on more friendly terms. Malcolm had cherished a hope that Marian would have bestowed her affections on an old school-fellow of his own, to whom he was very much attached, and whose father was a wealthy farmer, residing a few miles from Middleburn. Archer Stanway was an only child, so that his prospects were very bright ; and his love



for Marian Bartlet might be dated from the time when he used to visit his friend Malcolm in the holidays—a shy, awkward, plain lad of fifteen. His extreme diffidence was not in his favour, for the girls used to laugh at him, and play off merry tricks at his expense, for the fun of making him look foolish; and if he attempted to retaliate, it was in such a timid, hesitating way, that the laugh was still against himself. Now this is not the kind of intercourse that is apt to leave a tender impression on the heart of a young lady, whose beauty and winning manners are sure to attract many admirers; therefore, whilst Miss Bartlet could not but appreciate the high principles, the liberal mind, and amiable disposition of Archer Stanway, she had never encouraged his pretensions as a lover: so that when the handsome, dashing, self-confident Percy Beckwith entered the lists, poor Stanway saw at once that he stood no chance with so brilliant a rival, and came to the house no

more. He tried to stifle his regrets by devoting all his energies to the business of the farm that was to be his rich inheritance; but a passion so deeply rooted was not to be eradicated in a day, and he mourned in secret over the downfall of his long-cherished hopes.

Such was the position of affairs when Malcolm Bartlet came home, and so it continued up to the eventful day when the failure of Galt and Torrens produced a sudden revolution, as great as it was unexpected. Malcolm felt that it was a death-blow to all his schemes of happiness; for, though he did not for a moment believe that any change of circumstances would lessen the affection of his adored Emma, he knew well that her father's interdict would be the certain consequence of his altered fortunes. But with all these dismal forebodings he did not forget his mother's exhortation, and struggled hard to bear his own burden with patience, that he might not add one bitter

drop to his father's cup of misery. The wretched man was indeed so utterly cast down that he seemed incapable of acting—or even of thinking—for himself; and then it was that the superiority of woman's fortitude over that of the physically stronger sex, in the hour of affliction, was truly exemplified. Mrs. Bartlet saw at once what ought to be done, and did not hesitate to act accordingly. The first measure was to write to Lord de Vere, explaining exactly how the loss had occurred, without making any attempt to palliate the circumstances, or evade the liability. This was to be accompanied by a correct statement of all the resources Mr. Bartlet had at his disposal; which, according to Malcolm's calculation, were sufficient to realize the full amount of the debt.

“But, if I give all,” said the unhappy man, “what is to become of my children?”

“We must think of that afterwards, Charles,” his wife replied, calmly; “what

we have now to do is to prove to Lord de Vere that, however imprudent it might be to deviate from his instructions, your probity cannot be called in question."

"Yes, you are right, mother," said Malcolm; "that must be done at any sacrifice, and without a moment's delay. The land will sell for five thousand pounds, at the very least."

"The land! It was to have been your portion, my son."

"It matters not, father; it must go. There are some thousands in the funds."

"Four."

"That will make nine. There is the policy of insurance on your life."

"My God! my God!" exclaimed the father, clasping his hands in despair; "if that is given up, how is my wife to be provided for if I should die?"

"She will be provided for as long as I live," said Malcolm, firmly. "Father, your honour must be placed above the reach of

suspicion, which cannot be so long as you withhold a single shilling. Our course lies straight before us; then let us follow it without shrinking. As for me, I have youth, health, and, I hope, talent, to get on in the world; what more had you when you began?"

"Do as you think best, Malcolm—state what you will; but oh! my noble hearted boy, how shall I atone for the ruin I have brought upon you?"

"You have brought no ruin on me, my dear father. What was yours, was not mine; and if you have lost the power of aiding me, you are the greater sufferer."

Laura, who was present, and had listened with silent attention to all that had passed, now ventured to say—

"Lord De Vere is a very rich man; fifteen thousand pounds cannot be much to him. Who knows—perhaps he will exonerate my father from the loss."

"He will exact it to the uttermost far-

thing!" cried her father, despairingly; "I know him well: he is as hard as flint; he will take every farthing, and say it is his just due."

"And he will say truly, dear Charles," observed Mrs. Bartlet; "it is his just due, and let him take it. You began the world with nothing; you are still young enough to begin it again; and why should you not succeed as you have before? Take courage, my beloved husband; the evil must be met, and the only way to make it lighter to us all, is to meet it with fortitude."

With arguments such as these she succeeded at length in calming his mind so far that he was able to write to his noble patron a manly, straightforward letter, asking no favour beyond the grant of a little time, that he might not be obliged to dispose of his land at a disadvantage. Some days, however, must elapse ere he could receive an answer, and till that came it was useless to take any steps towards making

those alterations in the establishment which all agreed must be made, and endeavoured to talk of with cheerfulness. All thoughts of Christmas festivities were of course abandoned; the theatre was left unfinished; the tree put out of the way in the coach-house; even the preparations for a Christmas dinner were stopped, and apologies sent to several persons who had been invited to partake of it, and who, to say the truth, cared much more about the loss of the dinner than the occasion of the disappointment. Still the young people clung to the hope that the rich nobleman would not enforce his claim. They could not comprehend that hardness of heart which marks the cold, worldly, selfish man; and such was he on whom their future destiny now depended.

CHAPTER III.

Swift of flight is the messenger of evil tidings, and mysterious the paths by which he travels. Malcolm had not intended to inform the Rays of what had taken place till Lord De Vere's answer should arrive ; but when rumour goes abroad, who can tell whither its course may be directed, or where it will stop ? And so it came to pass that, on the second day after the failure of the bank, Malcolm received a letter superscribed in the delicate hand of Emma Ray,

which he opened with fear and trembling, though but little prepared for what it contained. This was not much—only eight lines—and they were thus worded :—

“Sir,—We have heard with regret of the unfortunate circumstances that have occurred in your family; and, as you must be aware that all correspondence between yourself and me must from this time cease, you will oblige me by returning all my letters, on the receipt of which I shall immediately forward yours. I beg you will understand that I do not desire any reply to this beyond your attention to the request it contains, as soon as may be convenient.

EMMA RAY.”

Malcolm read this contemptuous dismissal two or three times before he could credit the evidence of his senses. Was this the gentle girl he had loved so fondly? She who had so often whispered softly that none other than himself should ever win a thou-

sandth part of her affections. It was a bitter pill to swallow, and he flung himself into a chair, his heart full almost to bursting, when a slip of paper that had fallen on the carpet just at his feet caught his eye, and, snatching it up hastily, he read these words in pencil:—

“Dearest Malcolm,—I was forced to write these cruel lines. Do not believe them. Come what may, I am ever, ever yours. E. R.”

He started up in an ecstasy of delight, pressed the charming little missive over and over again to his lips, and felt as if he now could battle against Fate without a fear of being overthrown in the contest.

In due time came an answer from Lord De Vere, and it was precisely such a one as his unfortunate agent had anticipated—dry—sententious—highly expressive of his lordship’s unqualified surprise and displeasure that Mr. Bartlet should have presumed to act contrary to his instructions. There was

not a word that betokened the smallest particle of sympathy or sorrow for the ruin of an estimable family ; and the only thing that seemed to give any uneasiness to the writer was, that when all was surrendered there would probably still be a deficiency of five or six hundred pounds. Even the request for time was grudgingly acceded to, one month only being allowed the unhappy defaulter to answer the demands of this stern creditor, who, like him in the parable, showed no mercy, but cried out, " Pay me that thou owest."

" Marian," said Malcolm, " have you heard from Beckwith?"

" No, dear," she answered, the tears rushing to her eyes as she spoke ; " but it may be that my letter has not yet reached him, for he was not remaining in one place, and it would probably have to follow him."

" I have reason to think it has reached him."

“What reason, Malcolm ? You surely do not imagine——”

She hesitated and turned very pale, for she had been struggling with her own misgivings, and seeking to persuade herself that accident alone had delayed the expected reply to her last melancholy epistle, in which she had told him without reserve the different position her family would be placed in by the unforeseen calamity that had befallen them. She fondly hoped, in the confiding spirit of a woman’s unselfish love, that he would hasten to assure her that his faith was not to be shaken by reverse of fortune ; but her brother’s manner alarmed her, and after a while she said, anxiously—

“You have heard something about Percy ; tell me what it is.”

“I have heard nothing about him, but I met Dr. Beckwith this morning and he *would not* see me ; for, that he *did*, I am convinced. Now, what could that mean ?”

“I don’t know,” replied Marian, faintly.

"But I do, Marian ; I know very well what it means, and we must have an understanding with him. Will you authorize me to demand an explanation, or shall your father do it ? for one or other of us must."

"Oh ! no—no—not my father ; he must not be exposed to any mortification on my account, and Dr. Beckwith is such a proud man ; but why be in a hurry, Malcolm, why not wait a few days longer ? Perhaps I shall hear from Percy ; I think you are apt to judge him too severely."

"If so, an interview with the Doctor will settle the question, and I shall be quite ready to acknowledge my error. I must confess I never had a very exalted opinion of young Beckwith, and his conduct now will show whether I have been mistaken or not ; but it will never do to pass over the insult I met with to-day ; for it was a decided insult, not only to me, but to us all. So, shall I call on Dr. Beckwith ?"

"What will you say to him ?"

"I will desire to know whether he has had any communication with Percy respecting our affairs, and, if so, to what end."

"Do what you think right, dear Malcolm. If he should desert me for this cause, he is not worthy of a regret."

"Spoken like a heroine !" exclaimed Malcolm, embracing her affectionately ; "that is the sort of spirit I should wish to see in my sisters. I will go to him at once ; but you must prepare yourself, dear Marian, for what I firmly believe will be the result."

And, so saying, he departed on this very disagreeable errand.

Dr. Beckwith received him with an air of frigid politeness that confirmed all his previous suspicions. He stated briefly and without preface, his object in coming, to which the Doctor replied that he lamented exceedingly the necessity for breaking off an engagement that had been entered into with so much satisfaction to all the parties concerned ; but that, unless Mr. Bartlet

was prepared to fulfil his part of the agreement by giving his daughter two thousand pounds on her marriage, which he, Dr. Beckwith, understood it would not be in his power to do, the contract must be considered void.

"Am I to understand, sir, that these are your son's sentiments as well as your own?" asked Malcolm.

"Precisely, sir; I had a letter from him yesterday, in which he requested me to communicate with Mr. Bartlet to that effect, and I was on the point of doing so; but, as you have honoured me with this visit, I presume there will be no occasion for any further explanation."

"None whatever, sir," replied Malcolm, haughtily; "you have made your views sufficiently clear, and I am glad of it; for, as far as I am concerned, the termination of this engagement is highly satisfactory."

"That is fortunate," replied the doctor, with a slight sneer; "then, since we per-

fectly understand each other, it appears to me that no more need be said on the subject."

"Certainly not—either on this or any other subject. Good morning, sir."

And Malcolm walked out of the house with a proud step and a prouder heart, despising the worldly-mindedness of mankind, of which this was his first real experience. The painful task now remained of telling his sister what had passed, and he loitered for nearly an hour in the old churchyard, considering how he might best do it so that her predominant feeling should be contempt. However, he had little occasion to study his part, for Marian heard her fate with perfect composure, being quite prepared for the event, and it was a great relief to his mind to hear her say, very quietly—"Malcolm, dear, he was not worthy to be your brother. Let us speak of him no more."

And now it only wanted three days to Christmas Day. Two of the servants had

been discharged, and the remaining one was in a state of extreme disgust at having discovered that there was to be neither turkey nor plum-pudding to grace the Christmas board. No mince-pies were made, nor even a piece of beef ordered for roasting.

"What they are going to dine off, goodness knows!" said the discontented damsel to a friend who was conversing with her at the garden-gate, on the family affairs of their respective employers; "I certainly did consent to stay with them a week longer to oblige missis; but then, of course, I thought there would be a decent dinner on Christmas Day, at any rate, and somebody here, or else I wouldn't have stopped I can promise you."

Mr. Bartlet had in fact made a solemn vow never to admit a costly dish to his table, open another bottle of wine, or indulge in any luxury whatever, till the last farthing of his debt was paid, and Christmas Day was to be no exception to the strict

observance of this hard duty, although there was one circumstance that made it still harder at this particular time. He was expecting from America his only brother, whom he had not seen for more than twenty years, and who had expedited his journey in order to be with his relations on that usually festive occasion. The younger children had been talking with great glee of the anticipated arrival of Uncle Allan, for they had several favourite story-books about uncles coming at Christmas with pockets full of presents for the juveniles, and they firmly believed that such gifts were the certain concomitants of visiting uncles at that season of the year.

But Allan Bartlet was coming back to England a poor man. He had gone out to America twenty-four years ago with a little money and excellent prospects before him, and for some time he did very well, and seemed in a fair way of making a rapid fortune. But on a sudden the aspect of his

affairs changed, not by any fault of his own, but owing to the misconduct of others with whom he was connected, and he went down in a scale quicker than he had ascended.

During the last seven or eight years his letters had told of frequent losses, of the failure of almost everything in which he had embarked, and at last he said—

“I am reduced to such straits that I think I must come to England and try what I can do there. Write to me, dear Charles, and tell me if you see any chance of an opening for me in any way. I shall be guided entirely by your advice, for, though I am the elder, I believe you were always the wiser of the two.”

To this Mr. Bartlet had replied in the most affectionate terms, for the brothers were warmly attached to each other, notwithstanding their long separation, and he had said—

“Come, then, dear Allan, let my house be your home till you can make one for

yourself; you may reckon upon a kind reception from my wife, and will, I trust, find yourself comfortable amongst us. We will then consult about your future plans, and it is hard if we cannot find something for you to do."

A most grateful letter came in answer to this brotherly epistle, containing the welcome intelligence that Allan Bartlet would be in England before Christmas Day, and as it arrived before the misfortune happened that made his coming a less joyful event than it would have been under other circumstances, the news was, at the time, hailed with pleasure by the whole family."

CHAPTER IV.

The morning of Christmas Eve was as bright as a wintry sun could make it, with his pale beams reflected by glittering icicles and the frosted ground, which sparkled as if it were strewed with diamond dust. Every house in Middleburn was alive with active preparations for the morrow, except one, and there silence and sadness, such as pervades the abode of death, presented a melancholy contrast to the hilarity going on in the neighbouring domiciles. Friends, or

to use a more correct term, acquaintances, had, according to the course of human events, begun to look extremely cool on the ruined man. Not a hand was held out in kindly greeting ; not one of those who had often feasted at his table now said—“ Come and partake of our Christmas cheer.” Yet it was well known that the day was to be one of fasting and sorrow to the unfortunate family, for the “ sayings and doings” of the residents in a country town are in general pretty accurately ascertained by their neighbours. But it would be wrong to say they were altogether deserted in their need, or that there are no warm hearts, or kind friends in the world. Mr. Perrin had offered Malcolm a place in his office, with a liberal salary, which proposal was gratefully accepted, and the young man was preparing to leave Middleburn in a few days. Nor was this the only instance of disinterested friendship that shone like a beacon light through the dark-

ness, for Malcolm had accidentally met with Archer Stanway, who, so far from avoiding him, as many did, was more cordial than ever, and, after speaking with much good feeling of Mr. Bartlet's loss, said—

“Is it true, Malcolm, that Beckwith has broken off his engagement with your sister?”

“Yes, Archer, it is quite true, and I am heartily glad of it; you know what I always thought of him, and I was not far wrong it seems.”

“He is a mean-spirited scamp,” said Archer, with great indignation; “and the first time I meet with him, I shall tell him so. Ah! Malcolm, how differently I should have acted, had I been fortunate enough to win her regard.”

“I am sure you would, my dear fellow, and I wish, with all my heart, it had been so. Yet, perhaps, for your own sake, it is better as it is.”

“Better!” exclaimed the generous young

man. "If I thought there was the least chance that she would look kindly upon me, I would go this moment and throw myself at her feet. You do not know how sincerely, how devotedly I have loved her, or you would not say it is better as it is."

Malcolm made no reply, and, after a pause, Archer, in a timid, hesitating tone, said—

"Malcolm, tell me frankly, do you think, if I were now to offer myself to Miss Bartlet, she would accept me?"

"No, Archer, I am sure she would not—she could not; neither could I, under the present circumstances, advocate such a suit. You are a noble, generous fellow, but this cannot be."

"I comprehend your feelings," replied the young man; "and shall say nothing more just now. But there is one thing you must promise me; you must tell her what I have said; she must know that my sentiments at least are not changed; and if you

are really my friend, you will do thus much for me."

Malcolm considered for a few moments ; then replied—

"I will tell her all that has just passed between us. It is but justice to you to place your character in its true light."

"I thank you. This, then, I suppose, is all I must ask at present ; but mind, I do not give up all hope for the future, and perhaps what I have said now may tell in my favour, if a time should come when I may venture to say more."

Malcolm did repeat this conversation to his sister, on whom it could hardly fail to make a favourable impression, especially as contrasted with the contemptible conduct of her recreant lover ; but while she acknowledged Mr. Stanway's worth, and fully estimated his disinterestedness and truth, she felt all the impossibility of rewarding him as he desired to be rewarded, for how

might her motives be construed, even by himself?

It was, as already stated, the morning of Christmas Eve, and ten o'clock had not yet struck, when a fly from the station drove up to the door of Mr. Bartlet's house, exhibiting a goodly show of luggage, both inside and out.

"Uncle Allan is come!" cried one of the children joyfully, and Mr. Bartlet, with nervous trepidation, hastened to the door, to welcome his long-estranged brother. Both were, of course, much altered, for they had parted as young men, and now they had passed the meridian of life; but they recognised each other at once, and wept like boys with joy as they embraced, with all the warmth of true fraternal affection. These manifestations of brotherly love were, however, necessarily suspended for a while, amid the bustle of bringing in trunks and packing cases, and discharging the flyman: but when all this was done,

and the brothers had exchanged another hearty embrace, Mr. Allen Bartlet was introduced to his sister-in-law, and his nephew and nieces, all of whom were strangers to him ; but he shook hands with Malcolm and the elder ladies, and kissed the younger ones, with a right good will, that seemed to give him a claim at once to the long-established and manifold privileges of a kind-hearted bachelor uncle. He was a robust, jolly-looking man, with that sort of handsome, good-humoured countenance, which is pleasant to look upon, and sure to win the love and confidence of very young folks, who are tolerably good physiognomists in general.

“But you don’t look quite as you should do, Charles,” he said, when the first excitement of the meeting had, in some degree, subsided ; “have you been ill ?”

“Yes, Allan, I have been, and still am ill, both in mind and body. You have come to a sorrowful house, brother, and

will be sadly disappointed, I fear; for I shall not be able to give you such a reception as I hoped to do, and led you to expect. Since I wrote to you misfortune has suddenly come upon me—Allan, I am a ruined man!”

“I have heard it all, Charles; I know what has happened: but we must make the best of it; don’t be cast down, my boy. Fortune has played me many a slippery trick in my life, but I have managed to get on cheerily, nevertheless. Let us all forget our troubles just now, and enjoy our Christmas together, at any rate; then we can begin to think of what is to be done.”

“It will be but a sorry Christmas, Allan, for I cannot throw off these things so lightly. We shall have no Christmas dinner. I feel that it would be scarcely honest to spend a shilling now that can be saved.”

“Oh, nonsense! that will never do. These young ones must not go without their plum-pudding. I’ve got a few dollars in

my pocket yet, and I don't see how I can employ them to better purpose."

"No, no, my dear brother, keep your dollars; for you will want them. Share with us what we have, and welcome; for, as long as I have a roof to shelter me it shall shelter you also; and as long as I have bread and cheese you shall have your portion. But let us not waste the little you have saved in superfluous indulgences, that would only serve to make our privations the harder to bear. No, no; keep your money, and be content to fare as we do."

"But," said Allan, more seriously, "what right have I to stay here, a burden upon you, when you have so little for yourselves? I feel that I ought not to remain, since it is not in my power to give any assistance, and I cannot be here without adding to your expenses. What say you, sister-in-law? Am I not in the right?"

And he turned to Mrs. Bartlet, who replied—

"I can only repeat, sir, what my husband has already said. Till you can find a better home, our house is open to you, and I think I may say that your presence will greatly add to the happiness of us all."

"Well, then, since that is the case, I will stay; but it must be on this condition—that you will get, at my expense, as good a dinner for to-morrow as the time will allow. Never mind the cost. Let there be plenty, and let it be of the best."

"But, my dear Allan," Mr. Bartlet was beginning in a tone of remonstrance, when he was interrupted by his brother, who said gaily—

"Stop, my dear Charles—I am now going to let you into a little secret. I am a cheat—an impostor. I have come to you under false pretences, just to see what sort of faces you would all put on to a poor relation. So now I will tell you the truth. I am rich, Charles—I have brought over with me fifty thousand pounds,—yes, fifty thousand pounds, my dear

fellow—and, as you were willing to share your all with me, I shall be happy to return the compliment; and the first thing you have to do is to pay that niggardly lord every penny of his paltry debt, which, by the way, you would have been able to do without me; for I shall now tell you the good news that Galt and Torrens can pay twenty shillings in the pound. The stoppage was only a temporary affair. They are quite solvent. So now what do you say to a merry Christmas—eh, sister-in-law? Eh, my pretty nieces?”

To describe the astonishment, the joy, and the gratitude of the now happy family would be impossible. Malcolm shook hands with his uncle over and over again; the two girls first laughed, then cried, then laughed again; while their mother threw herself into her husband's arms, and shed more tears in her joy than she had suffered to fall in her sorrow. The Christmas

Dinner, though provided on such short notice, was well worthy of the occasion ; and the happy faces assembled round the festive board gave uncle Allan, who was addicted to the good old custom of making long speeches, an opportunity of saying what has very often been said before, and since, that "It was the proudest day of his life." With Malcolm's assistance, he had prepared also a little surprise for the evening, so that while some merry games and forfeits were going on, the door was suddenly flung wide open, and there, in all its glittering glory, stood the Christmas tree in the hall, brilliantly illuminated with miniature wax candles, and hung with handsome presents for the ladies and the children—another instance of the good natured eccentricity, as well as the munificence, of Mr. Allan Bartlet.

The wonderful events that had transpired in the Bartlet family were soon spread

abroad, and every tongue in Middleburn was busy with the news of the rich uncle coming from abroad, and pouring out his wealth upon his relations in a golden shower. Then those who had looked the most coldly on them during their brief term of adversity suddenly became the warmest friends in the world, and were eager to offer their congratulations on the joyful change. Amongst these was Dr. Beckwith, who took a vast deal of trouble to excuse his own conduct and clear his son from all blame; but the attempt failed, for Marian had too much good sense not to see through his motives, and when she received a letter from Percy, soliciting her pardon, and throwing all the odium of his desertion on his father, she gave it into the hands of her brother, requesting him to reply to it as he thought proper.

“And what shall I say to Archer Stanway, Marian?”

“Tell him,” she replied with a smile that required no magician to interpret its meaning, “tell him we shall be happy to see him on New Year’s Eve !”

THE END.

DOUBLE DEALING.

DOUBLE DEALING.

Mr. Braybrook was one of those easy-going individuals who, being fortunate enough to have a straight path cut out and made smooth for them by others, travel, or rather glide, through life without the trouble of much thought or exertion. In fact, he held an appointment in one of the Government offices, where he had risen gradually; not by any efforts of his own, but merely by stepping into the shoes left vacant by the death or promotion of those above him,

until he had reached a post to which was attached a salary of one thousand pounds a-year; and, according to the general rule, his duties became lighter as his emoluments increased, which appears to be a very equitable arrangement in all offices of every description; since it is clear that if one man has heavy duties and light pay, another light duties and heavy pay, the weight of the professional burthen is equally balanced.

Now one thousand a year, though a large salary, is but a moderate income, after all, for a man who is blessed with a wife given to fashionable attire, a daughter of a marriageable age, and four younger scions of the house, whose boarding school bills form no small item in the annual expenses; consequently, Miss Braybrook, although very handsome and very accomplished, wanted the one great charm which, in this degenerate age, is apt to outshine all other attractions. In short, she had no fortune, and it was probably owing to this deficiency that

at two and twenty she was Miss Braybrook still, with the fear before her eyes of holding that title in perpetuity—a possession she by no means wished to retain for so long a period, being, in point of fact, already tired of it.

At length a brighter prospect opened upon her view, with bridal cake and orange blossoms in the distance, for the Fates, who settle all these things in their own way, decreed that she should meet at an evening party with one who, having been but little accustomed to ladies' society, was rather more open than most men are to the fascinations of brilliant eyes and a soft tongue, which allurements, together with a charming voice, displayed in some of Lover's sweetest songs, two or three polkas danced with infinite grace and spirit a few lively repartees, and a little sentimental conversation, were set in formidable array against his bosom's peace. This susceptible swain was a Mr. Sidney Weston, a wine merchant,

who had lately succeeded, by the death of his father, to a good business, and a considerable independent property. He was about eight and twenty, sufficiently good looking to be called handsome by many people, and very gentlemanlike in his manners; but he had not had much leisure for the study of the female character, and was disposed to take all for gold that glittered, so that he made up his mind, somewhat hastily it must be confessed, that Elinor Braybrook was a young lady eminently calculated to make him happy during the remainder of his life. Under all these circumstances, he did not experience much difficulty in placing himself upon visiting terms with the family; and so it came to pass, that in less than six weeks from the evening of the eventful party above mentioned, a proposal for the hand of the fair Elinor was made and accepted, and Sidney Weston looked upon himself as the happiest man in the world, whilst everybody said

how fortunate Miss Braybrook was to get such an offer, when it was notorious that her father could not give her a single shilling (speaking figuratively, of course). The courtship went on pretty smoothly for some time, only interrupted occasionally by the usual quarrels and reconciliations which, like pepper and salt, are necessary to correct insipidity. It is true that the gentleman could not help, now and then, entertaining certain misgivings as to the amiability of his beloved in her own domestic circle, and was sometimes rather startled by an exhibition of selfish feeling or coldheartedness, that did not augur well for his project of turning his home into a paradise, by bringing an angel to preside over it. However, it was but rarely, and by accident, that any signs of such uncelestial attributes appeared, and the unpleasant impression they might make for the moment was soon effaced by more than ordinary kindness on the part of the young lady.

Thus, all went on happily till the end of July, when Mr. Weston had occasion to go to Oporto on business, which he thought might probably oblige him to visit some parts of Spain; consequently, the duration of his absence was uncertain, and the time for the marriage could not be fixed till his return. The lovers parted with mutual protestations of everlasting truth; the fair Elinor shed abundance of tears, and declared she should not have a happy moment until she was assured of his safe arrival at his destined port, and should be wretched every time she heard the wind blow during the voyage; whilst Sidney vowed on his part that the most beautiful country in the world, without the light of her smiles, would be to him a dreary desert. This seems to be a very usual thing for lovers to say when they are going away; yet, somehow or other, they generally manage to enjoy themselves pretty well in the said desert, which is all right, no doubt, although

simple individuals, who have never been in love, cannot exactly comprehend it. About this time it happened that the lease of Mr. Braybrook's house at Chelsea expired, and he was persuaded by a friend to take a large, old-fashioned, rambling mansion, some fifteen or sixteen miles from town, which the said friend wanted to get rid of at any price, although he declared that nothing but the most sincere and disinterested regard for Mr. Braybrook would induce him to let it at a rent that was considerably below half its value.

"The journey every day, and sleeping in good fresh air, would do you an immense deal of good," said this friendly adviser. "You would be quite another man, depend upon it."

Now, whether it was that Mr. Braybrook did not feel satisfied with his personality, and was desirous of such a metamorphosis, is not very clear; but certain it is that he agreed to take the residence in question for

a year on trial, one great inducement being that it was near the railway station, so that he could get to town in half an hour.


His wife and daughter were not particularly delighted at the prospect of being "buried alive," as they termed it, which it must be owned is not a pleasant idea; but as it was only for a limited period, and the grand aim of Elinor's life was already happily accomplished, they did not make so many objections as they might have done, perhaps, under different circumstances, but prepared with a tolerably good grace for the removal. Northchase Hall, their new abode, was a brick building of a rather dubious style of architecture, the main body having probably formed a portion of some great family mansion in days of yore, when London was a Utopian land to the wives and daughters of country squires; but wings and arms, of various forms and dimensions, had been added by different occupiers according to their taste or convenience, so

that it presented outwardly a strange irregular appearance to the eye, and in wandering about the interior, an uninitiated explorer came continually upon unexpected doors and rooms, obscure passages, and mysterious staircases, that bewildered the brain, and caused a confusion of ideas as to the relative position of any one apartment with respect to another. Some of the floors, as well as the principal staircase, were of polished oak, an ancient fashion, that nobody in these times can possibly have any interest in preserving, unless it be the surgeons of the district, who may thereby get a broken arm or leg to set occasionally.

There was a large garden in pretty good order, with some fine old fruit trees in it, which was pleasant enough to look at in the bright summer time, as all gardens are that are plentifully bedecked with choice and brilliant flowers; but, unfortunately, the bright summer time is little more than a poetical delusion in this cloudy climate of

ours, which is a sad drawback to the charms of a country life to those who have not been accustomed to it. The ladies of the Braybrook family, however, reconciled themselves to a temporary sojourn in the wilderness, to use their own emphatic mode of expression, since it would be enlivened by the bustle of preparation for the approaching marriage, and by the marriage itself; but Mrs. Braybrook mentally resolved that, when Elinor was gone, she would not let her husband have a moment's peace till he should consent to give up this whim of living out of town, and return to the gay scenes of the great metropolis.

The lovers kept up a regular correspondence. Sidney's long epistles expressed the most ardent and unalterable affection, and were responded to in a manner which perfectly satisfied him that his love was met by a return as warm and sincere as he could possibly desire. His absence was of longer duration than had been anticipated; but a



length there came a letter to herald his return, and joyfully did Elinor announce the tidings that he was to sail from Oporto on the twenty-fifth of October in the *Minerva*, and hoped to arrive at Southampton, in spite of equinoctial gales, early in November.

This intelligence was extremely pleasing to Mr. Braybrook, who had a great regard for his prospective son-in-law, whom he knew to be a strictly honourable and very excellent young man, and whose society was always agreeable to him. His wife, too, was well pleased; and, on the whole, the coming of Mr. Weston was looked forward to with satisfaction by all parties concerned. The letter was dated from Lisbon, and it so happened that, on the very day it arrived, the Braybrooks received an invitation to dine on the twenty-fifth of October, which was the Thursday in the following week, at the house of Mr. Gurney, a gentleman of fortune, who lived in rather splendid style,

about four miles distant from Northchase Hall, and as this was the first time they had been invited, the ladies were bent upon making an elegant appearance, and went to town accordingly to order new dresses for the occasion, although Mr. Braybrook ventured to remonstrate against what appeared to him, he said, a very unnecessary expense. His objections were, however, speedily overruled, nor did he attempt to maintain his ground, knowing by frequent experience how utterly useless it would be. Mrs. Gurney was a very dashing woman, and she had a sister staying with her, a young lady who was reputed to have twenty thousand pounds, and was very accomplished, but remarkably plain, and unprepossessing in her manners, so that Elinor who was the only young lady beside her at the dinner party in question, appeared to great advantage, and excited much admiration, for she really was very handsome, and on the present occasion was exceedingly well dressed,

and certainly did shine out with more than ordinary lustre.

Among the guests was a Mr. Walsingham, of Derby, a gentleman of large estate, about forty years of age, not very polished, but respectable looking and agreeable, rather portly and somewhat bald, yet by no means ill-looking either ; and even if he had been, few ladies would have seen it, since he was a wealthy man and unmarried. He paid almost exclusive attention to Miss Braybrook, evidently to the dissatisfaction of Mrs. Gurney's sister, whose ill humour, of course, made the gentleman's devotion all the more acceptable to the fair one at whose shrine it was offered. Mrs. Braybrook began to think it a pity Elinor was engaged, and at night, as she was retiring to rest, could not help expressing that sentiment to her husband, who briefly and ungallantly replied that "women's notions were always particularly absurd."

About a week after this, Mr. Braybrook,

on passing by Westminster Hall, chanced to meet with Mr. Walsingham, who was staying in town in consequence of some lawsuit, and as that gentleman seemed inclined to be very friendly, he invited him to dine at Northchase Hall on the following Thursday, and the invitation was accepted with much pleasure. This was Monday, but Mr. Braybrook did not mention the circumstance at home till Wednesday morning, when, as he was going out, he turned back and said, in a careless tone—

“Oh! by the way, my dear, I forgot to tell you that I have asked Mr. Walsingham to come down to dinner to-morrow.”

“Dear me!” exclaimed the lady, “why didn’t you mention it before? We might have asked the Gurneys and the Thorntons, but there’s not time now. What a pity! It would have been such a charming opportunity to have had them all.”

Now this was exactly what the prudent husband wanted to avoid, and that was the

reason he had not said a word about the expected visit of Mr. Walsingham till this moment, when he knew it was too late to make arrangements for a dinner party ; but he was wise enough to conceal this *ruse de guerre* under an affectation of sympathetic feeling, replying thus—

“ Yes, it is rather a pity : but, you see, I met him by accident, and he said he would come down and eat his mutton with us in a friendly, unceremonious way, so I could not help it, and there’s no occasion to have anything more than usual.”

And so saying, he sallied forth, well pleased with the success of his manœuvre.

Mr. Braybrook was the most regular man in the world in his habits ; he always went out at precisely a quarter to ten, and came home a few minutes before five ; but, on this particular day, five o’clock had struck some time since, and he had not yet made his appearance.

The half hour came, a quarter to six, still

no Mr. Braybrook, and the cook had sent twice to know if she should take up the dinner, to which important query the reply had each time been, "We will wait ten minutes longer." The hand of the clock was on the point of six, and the hand of Mrs. Braybrook on the dining room bell, when the absentee appeared at the far end of the lawn, not with hurried step, like a man who was late for dinner, but walking slowly with his eyes bent on the ground, and a troubled expression in his face.

"There is something the matter!" exclaimed both ladies in alarm. "An accident on the railway, perhaps," suggested Elinor; "or some bad news of the children," said the mother. But far different was the cause Mr. Braybrook's dejected countenance and trembling voice, as he evasively, at first, replied to their anxious questionings. At length he said—

"I have, indeed, bad news to communi-

cate: the Minerva is wrecked, and every soul has perished."

Violent were the demonstrations of grief that followed the announcement of this awful catastrophe. Elinor wept and sobbed aloud, her mamma went into hysterics, and the dinner remained full half an hour on the table untasted; but when the violence of the first shock had in some measure subsided, both ladies became sufficiently composed to partake of the fowls and ham before them, to the no small astonishment of the simple minded gentleman, who had anticipated a week's illness, at the least, on the part of his daughter. However, he soon obtained a clue to the mystery, for, in the course of the evening, he said to his wife—

"It is very unfortunate that I happened to ask Walsingham for to-morrow. I would have put him off if I had known where to find him, but he did not give me his address."

"I am very glad you have not put him

off," she replied. "I'm sure I lament this sad accident as much as anybody can possibly do, for I really had a very great regard for poor Weston; but it is my belief that everything happens for the best, and I do request, Mr. Braybrook, that you will not make any allusion to this melancholy event to-morrow before Mr. Walsingham, nor let a word drop as to Elinor's having been engaged."

Mr. Braybrook opened his eyes somewhat wider, and shrugged his shoulders in rather a contemptuous manner.

"So that's it, is it?" he said. "Well, I shall not interfere, but I really wish that girl had more soul about her. Why, it is scarcely two hours since she heard of the death of this poor young fellow, and she is already casting about for somebody to supply his place, is she? I do not like the feeling, or the want of feeling rather." Then turning away, he muttered to himself, "it is absolutely disgraceful."

Elinor looked very mournful all that evening. She sighed deeply at times, and every now and then wiped a tear from her cheek ; but the next morning, although she complained of headache, and said she had passed a sleepless night, she looked remarkably well, considering.

Mr. Walsingham came. Mrs. Braybrook was all smiles and affability, Elinor extremely amiable, and if not quite so gay as when he saw her before, was not the less enchanting on that account to one who was disposed to view everything she said and did in a favourable light, and he certainly never once suspected that the somewhat subdued manner that so charmingly contrasted with the liveliness he knew she could at times exhibit, was occasioned by so sad and recent a calamity. Had he known the truth, he would perhaps not have considered it a very safe speculation to invest his affections in one who could so easily transfer her own.

The day passed off pleasantly enough; he said a great many complimentary things, declared he was tired of leading a bachelor's life, and made an engagement to come again early in the following week.

"I am so glad to see that dear Elinor bears her loss with so much fortitude," says Mrs. Braybrook to her liege lord.

To which observation that gentleman replied—

"Why, she finds there's a chance of getting a husband, nevertheless; that, I imagine, is the sum total of her gratitude."

"Dear me! Mr. Braybrook, how strangely you look at things. I wonder you are not pleased at the dear girl's having so good a prospect. I'm sure I look upon it as the most fortunate chance in the world that she should have happened to meet with Mr. Walsingham just at this time; it is as if Providence had ordered it so."

The gentleman answered by one of those peculiar shrugs that expresses a sceptical

state of mind, but he said nothing, as he had not the slightest intention to discourage Mr. Walsingham's advances; for, whatever might be his private opinion with regard to the conduct of his wife and daughter, he was by no means desirous of having the latter left on his hands, and sincerely hoped that Mr. Walsingham was in earnest. On that point he was not long left in doubt, for the next visit settled it to his satisfaction. A formal proposal was made and accepted for the hand of the fair Elinor, and the enamoured bachelor devoutly believed he had secured unto himself a matchless treasure.

As there was nothing to wait for, it was agreed that the wedding should take place immediately after Christmas, and Paris was fixed upon as the most agreeable place of sojourn at that season of the year for a newly married pair during the first few weeks of their matrimonial career; and all these preliminaries being arranged, the

bridegroom elect went off in high spirits to Derby, to make preparations at Walsingham Lodge for the reception of his bride. The ladies, too, had plenty to do; and the quantity of shopping they contrived to execute in the short space of time allowed was really wonderful, and showed a great deal of talent that way.

About a week before Christmas Day the younger branches of the family came home for the holidays, two boys and two girls, varying in age from nine to fifteen. Fortunately for Elinor, they had known nothing of her engagement to Sidney Weston; for, if they had, it would have been hopeless to think of keeping it a secret, therefore she congratulated herself on her prudence in having withheld from them the knowledge of a circumstance it would now have been particularly inconvenient that they should be acquainted with.

Christmas Eve brought Mr. Walsingham again to Northchase Hall, elate with the

anticipation of future bliss. He presented Elinor with some valuable ornaments as bridal gifts; gave to Mrs. Braybook a splendid diamond brooch, and to the two younger girls a gold chain each. Nor were the boys forgotten; and proud, indeed, was Harry, the eldest, at finding himself for the first time master of a watch; whilst his brother George was no less pleased with a very good microscope, a possession he had long coveted. These handsome presents, of course, established the donor high in the favour of the young people, who were extremely delighted at the prospect of having so generous a brother-in-law, for they very soon understood what his position was in the family. Elinor appeared that day at dinner in a most becoming dress of rich dark green silk. She wore in her hair some bright red roses that looked remarkably well, and her white round arms were adorned with the beautiful bracelets her affianced husband had just given her. There

was no other company at the Hall, but it was a merry party nevertheless; for Mr. Walsingham was one of those men who delight in promoting mirth, and he liked as well as the boys and girls did to play at snapdragon and forfeits, and would not have objected to blind man's buff. The weather was unusually mild for the season; there was no snow on the ground, no ice in the pond, no possibility of skating or sliding, which was a great disappointment to the two boys, who had been lamenting all day the absence of a good hard frost.

"I am afraid we shall have no fun out of doors this Christmas," said George, "and I thought it would be so glorious to be here in the country all the holidays."

"You must have all your fun in doors," said Mr. Walsingham; "so, now, what shall we do to-night to amuse ourselves? We ought to be merry on Christmas Eve—who's for 'puss in the corner?'"

"Oh, I am!" cried Mary, the youngest

girl. The rest, however, objected, and other games were proposed ; but at length Harry said—

“ I’ll tell you what’s better than any game—let us tell ghost stories ; that’s the thing for Christmas Eve ! ”

“ But who knows any ghost stories ? ” Mr. Braybrook asked, laughing. “ I suppose you do, Harry, by your making the proposal ? ”

“ No, I don’t,” replied Harry ; “ but I am sure Mr. Walsingham does, from something he said to-day when we were looking at the old tapestry in the room at the end of the long gallery—that is what made me think of it.”

“ Oh, yes—I know a capital ghost story,” replied the good-humoured guest, “ that will make everybody’s hair stand on end all day to-morrow. But perhaps your mamma and your sister are not fond of such terrible tales ? ”

Elinor laughed, and said she should like

uncommonly to hear it; and Mrs. Braybrook having signified her approbation, the social party formed a semicircle before the blazing fire and disposed themselves to listen to the promised narration. It was now about eight o'clock, and the wind was heard howling rather dismally around the old mansion, roaring in the wide chimnies, and singing a mournful dirge among the ivy that covered the east end of the building.

"It is going to be a stormy night," observed Mr. Braybrook. "Do you hear the wind?"

"Never mind the wind, pa'," said George; "let us hear the story. Now, Mr. Walsingham we are all ready."

Mr. Walsingham put on as grave a look as he could muster for the occasion, and thus began:—

"When Richard I. was king of England there was a brave knight called Sir Valentine Delacroix, who was going to fight in the Holy Land. He was in love with a

beautiful lady, as was the bounden duty of every valiant knight in those days, and he believed that she loved him as well as he did her, for she had told him so a hundred times, and of course he never thought of doubting it. They parted with vows of mutual affection; the knight swore he would be faithful till death, and the lady declared that she would never think of another lover even if he should be killed in the wars, but would shut herself up in a convent and mourn for his loss all the rest of her life. Now, Sir Valentine, who was all truth and honour himself, was satisfied with this promise, especially when, to convince him of her sincerity, she added a wish that if she should hear he had fallen in battle, and failed to keep the vow she had just made, his ghost might appear at her marriage feast, and separate her from her bridegroom for ever."

At this point of his story the narrator was interrupted by a loud ringing at the

hall door, which created much surprise and no little alarm.

"Bless me!" exclaimed the lady of the house, "who can be coming here so late on such a night as this?"

"I dare say it is the ghost," replied Harry, laughing; "it sounded like a supernatural ring."

Scarcely had he uttered the prophetic words when the door flew open, and Sidney Weston stood before them—not a disembodied spirit, but in full life and health, his animated countenance beaming with happiness and love, whilst his rapid, joyous greeting was in the tone of one who felt sure of a sincere welcome. Judge then of his feelings when, instead of meeting him with smiles and words of gladness, his adored Elinor cried out, with looks of horror and dismay—"Oh! save me! save me!" and fell senseless on the floor, whilst her mother shrieked aloud, and Mr. Braybrook stood gazing upon him with a bewildered

air, like one just awakened from a troubled dream. All this was incomprehensible to Mr. Walsingham and the younger members of the family, who wondered much at the strange confusion and apparent terror occasioned by the entrance of one who seemed to them only an ordinary mortal like themselves. The two girls ran to assist Elinor, who had really fainted, and Mr. Walsingham, raising her in his arms, laid her on a sofa, and called for water and vinegar, which he applied to her hands and temples, unconscious that the eyes of the unexpected guest were fixed upon him with wrathful amazement.

"Sidney," said Mr. Braybrook, in a low, solemn voice, "is it you in life, or is it your spirit, come to reproach us with our illtimed mirth?"

"I have not the least idea what you mean, sir," replied the astonished young man; "nor can I imagine why my arrival

should cause all this disturbance. Did you not expect me?"

"Expect you? It was said that not a soul escaped from the wreck!"

"What wreck? This is all a mystery to me. I have heard of no wreck."

"The *Minerva*—the ship you were to come by. It was lost, and we believed you had perished."

Here, then, was a solution of the mystery, and he saw in an instant the true state of affairs. It was a painful discovery, but pride enabled him to bear it with manly fortitude. He briefly explained that he had been detained at Oporto a few weeks beyond the time he had fixed for his departure, and had sent a letter to that effect by the *Minerva*, which he had never doubted had reached its destination, as he was ignorant of the loss of that vessel; consequently he had supposed his coming would be looked for at Christmas, and did not think it necessary even to give notice of his arrival.

During this explanation, Elinor, who had recovered from the first effect of the apparition, left the room with her mother, nor did Sidney make any attempt to speak to or detain her. But there was now another mystery to be cleared up for the edification of Mr. Walsingham, who was quite easy in his mind with respect to what he had seen and heard within the last quarter of an hour. He therefore addressed himself to Mr. Weston in the following terms :—

“I do not know who you are, sir, or what claims you may have on this family ; but I feel justified in requiring an explanation of certain expressions you have used in reference to the young lady who has just quitted the room.”

“And I should like to know, sir,” replied Sidney, “what right you have to make such a demand.”

To which Mr. Walsingham unhesitatingly replied—

“The right of one who in a few days will

be her husband, unless he finds reason to break the contract." Then turning to Mr. Braybrook he added, "I am a plain man, Mr. Braybrook, but a straightforward and, I hope, an honourable one. If everything has been fair and open, I will gladly fulfil my engagement; but if there has been any double dealing, all further intercourse between us is at an end."

Poor Mr. Braybrook was overwhelmed with shame and vexation.

"It was no doing of mine," he said, confusedly; "but I own I was wrong to suffer it. Mr. Walsingham, I feel that you have not been fairly dealt with, and are perfectly justified in altering your intentions. As for you, Mr. Weston, I am heartily rejoiced to see you alive and well, and I hope that whenever you and I meet, it will be as friends; but I am quite aware that, after what has happened, we can never be relations."

"True, sir," returned the young man,

proudly; "and as I have now no claim to your hospitality, I shall wish you a good night."

Mr. Braybrook made a faint attempt to persuade him to remain, but this he positively refused to do, saying he should go back to the inn for that night, and return to town in the morning.

"And I will go with you," said Mr. Walsingham, rising. "You will excuse my abrupt departure, Mr. Braybrook, but as I must decline the honour of becoming a member of your family, I feel that to stay here any longer would be an intrusion. Good night."

And so the two quondam lovers went away together, ordered a good supper and beds at the inn, and after a long conversation on the subject of their wrongs, mutually agreed that they had reason to congratulate themselves and each other on their escape from a union with a woman so heartless, and capable of so much dissimulation.

It may readily be imagined that the inhabitants of Northchase Hall did not spend a very merry Christmas. There was, in fact, but little concord in the family after this disappointment, and at the age of thirty-two, Elinor Braybrook, having experienced the mortification of seeing both the younger sisters well married, was still at home with her parents, a maiden all forlorn.

THE END

THE
CAUTIOUS BACHELOR.

THE

CAUTIOUS BACHELOR.

CHAPTER I.

“Lillybond going to be married! Not he, depend upon it. Where did you hear that unlikely story?”

“I heard it at the club; and, from what was said, I concluded it was a settled thing. But why do you say unlikely?”

“Because he is far too cautious for that, and always fancying somebody is wanting to get hold of him. Why, sir, he never offers to shake hands with a single woman

for fear she should have a hook concealed in her glove."

"Ha! ha! ha! A new method of securing a man's hand, whether he will or no. But he'll be caught some of these days, like the rest of us. I thought I was pretty careful, but Mrs. B. contrived to get hold of me somehow or other." And the speaker laughed heartily in making allusion to this sad mishap.

The two respectable, middle-aged gentlemen, who were thus pleasantly discoursing on a subject of such universal interest, were at that moment passengers in an omnibus on its way from Bayswater to the Bank; and, from certain desultory remarks with which the conversation was interlarded, it might be inferred that they were stock-brokers bound for their respective offices in the city.

"And was any lady mentioned in this report?" asked the one who had expressed

his unmitigated disbelief of the rumour in circulation.

“Oh, yes ; it was Seaton’s daughter.”

“Fanny Seaton ! Why, she’s quite a girl ; and he is—let me see—he must be full seven or eight and forty. I don’t believe a word of it.”

“Then what can take him to Chelsea so often ? I understand he dined at the Seaton’s three times last week, and is going there to an evening party to-morrow.”

“And so it follows that he is to marry Miss Fanny, eh ?”

“Why, it looks very like it. Fanny is a nice girl, and I dare say she would not object to his five thousand a year.”

“I don’t know how that might be ; but it’s my opinion he’ll never give her the chance. No, no ; he’s booked for an old bachelor, and no mistake.”

“Well, we shall see. What will you bet that he is not married before this day twelvemonth ?”

“What will I bet? Why, I’m not a betting man in general; but I don’t mind venturing a rump steak and a bottle of claret.”

“Done! I’ll make a note of it. Let me see, this is the fifteenth.”

And he took out his pocket-book to make a memorandum of the wager. Scarcely was this done, when the omnibus stopped at the Bank, and the two gentlemen got out, paid their sixpences, shook hands, and parted. Now it might be supposed, from the freedom of speech in which they had indulged, that they were the sole occupants of the vehicle in question, but this was not the case; and it would be quite as well if gentlemen and ladies who travel in public conveyances were to make a point of recollecting that Nature has furnished their fellow-passengers with ears—a fact that is sometimes imprudently overlooked—as by our two friends, whose somewhat amusing colloquy, though conducted *sotto voce*, had

afforded prodigious entertainment to a comely widow, who sat, with the most unconscious look imaginable, in one corner of the omnibus, her eyes fixed on the opposite window, as if her whole attention was engrossed by the world outside: whereas, she was imbibing every word of the conversation that was going on within, and noting it down in her memory as correctly as though she had taken it in short-hand. What her meditations were we have no authority to divulge; but the result was that, about half-way up King William Street, she stopped the omnibus, and, contrary to her previous intention of proceeding to the London Bridge Station, alighted then and there, paid the fare, and turned back towards the Royal Exchange.

"Why, she said she was a going to the station," observed the conductor, with an air of indignation, as if he felt himself an injured person. "These women never know what they'd be at."

The fair dame, whose changeful mood had caused her sex to be thus shamefully maligned, walked on nimbly till she reached the end of the street, where she was accosted by three or four rough-voiced and rough-coated individuals, all endeavouring to promote the interests of their several "busses," by engaging her as a passenger therein.

"Chelsea!" said the lady, in a decided tone.

"Here you are, marm," responded the conductor of the vehicle destined for that locality, at the same time opening the door.

"Are you going directly?" she inquired.

"Not till you are in, marm, 'cause it wouldn't be perlite," which facetious reply the lady did not condescend to notice, but, taking her seat, looked at her watch, and said mentally—

"A quarter past eleven!"

The journey was barren of incident, except that an old gentleman fell asleep, and

was carried on to Charing Cross, when he had requested to be set down at Temple Bar, at which untoward accident he expressed much dissatisfaction ; and at twelve o'clock precisely the good-looking widow knocked at the door of one of the best houses in that dullest of all places of human habitation, Sloane Square, Chelsea.

"Is Mrs. Seaton at home?" she asked of the maid-servant who opened the door.

"No, mem ; but Miss Fanny is."

The lady gave her card, and was ushered into the drawing-room, where she was speedily joined by a very handsome, lively girl, who accosted her in a joyful tone.

"My dear Mrs. Marsden, I am so delighted. Why, we did not expect you till Thursday."

"No dear, I know it; but I was obliged to come to town a day or two sooner than I intended, so if it is not convenient to have me till Thursday, I can sleep at my old lodgings."

"Oh, no! that you shan't. It is quite convenient to have you now; and mamma will be so pleased, for she was saying this morning, what a pity it was you would not be here for our party to-morrow. We are going to have such a nice evening."

"Are you, dear?—then I am fortunate just to be in time. But how's mamma and papa?"

"They are both very well. I expect mamma in every minute—she is not gone far. When did you come to town?"

"Only this morning. I left my boxes at Mrs. Turner's, and came on here directly to let you know I had arrived, but I told her I should most likely stay with her two or three days."

"But you will do no such thing, I can tell you; so take off your bonnet, and make yourself at home. We can send to Mrs. Turner's for your things, so there's no occasion to trouble yourself about that."

"You are very kind, love; well, it shall

be just as you please. And so you are going to have an evening, are you? Who have you got coming?"

"Oh, lots of nice people. The Hartlands, and the Brands—who, you know, are very musical—and the handsome Sir Philip Blencoe, that we heard so much about at Brighton last summer. Papa has lately got acquainted with him, and he is really one of the most elegant men I ever saw."

"Bless me, Fanny! Why, what has become of Mr. Fairley?"

"He is out of hearing, at any rate," she replied, with a merry laugh. "However, don't be alarmed as to my loyalty. I was only setting forth Sir Philip's attractions for your especial edification. But there's a counterpoise: he is notoriously poor."

"I have heard as much; and rather gay, is he not?"

"So people say; but he is very agreeable, nevertheless. By the way, I must tell you that we have a rich bachelor coming to-

morrow—a Mr. Lillybond—the most amusing person in the world. He would suit you exactly, only I am afraid he is quite impracticable.”

“Indeed! And pray, Miss Seaton, how did you ascertain that notable fact?—Mr. Charles had better look about him, I think.”

“Oh! if Charlie had reason to be jealous of anybody, it certainly would not be Mr. Lillybond. Why, the old gentleman prizes himself so highly that I have not the least doubt that he took care to know that I was was provided with a tender swain, before he ventured to set his foot in the house; and I shouldn’t at all wonder if he were to leave off visiting us when he finds you are staying here.”

“Lor! my dear; why?” asked the lady, with an admirable look of surprise.

“Simply because you are a widow, and he looks upon himself as worth having.”

“Mercy on us! He is safe enough, as far as I am concerned. You know, child,

nothing would induce me to marry again, so the gentleman need not discontinue his visits on my account. What sort of a man is he ?”

“He’s pleasant enough, rather fidgetty, but has plenty to say, and is very fond of being witty in a small way ; and he likes one to laugh at his witticisms, which is sometimes an effort ; however, I generally manage it, and so I am a favourite.”

“Is he quite an old man ?”

“Oh, dear, no ; he owns to five and forty, which may be, perhaps, half a dozen years under the mark ; but he takes a good deal of pains with himself, and looks younger than he is.”

“Good looking, then, I suppose ?”

“No, he is remarkably plain ; but tall, and a pretty good figure. He and Sir Philip Blencoe are exactly of a height. But I forgot, you have never seen Sir Philip.”

“No, that is a pleasure to come.”

Here the conversation between these two

lively ladies was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Seaton, a quiet, ladylike, matter-of-fact person, not addicted to such light gossip—consequently, the discourse turned on graver matters; and while the three are holding a consultation as to the most speedy and convenient mode of obtaining Mrs. Marsden's luggage, under which term was comprehended the elegant head gear, and numerous captivating vanities to be put in requisition on the following evening, we will take an opportunity of giving a brief account of the lady herself. She was in the second year of her widowhood. Her late husband was the commander of a vessel in the service of the East India Company; but although a first-rate captain he was by no means a first-rate mate, and the news of his death, which occurred during a homeward voyage, was received by his wife as a benefit rather than a misfortune, inasmuch as that event placed her in immediate possession of a pension double the amount of the

scanty pittance he had allowed her for her maintenance during his frequent and long absences.

But his want of liberality in that respect was not her only grievance. She had other wrongs to endure of a more vexatious complexion than the mere fact of being debarred from her natural right of spending her fair share of his worldly wealth, which share she, as a wife, would probably hold herself justified in computing at three-fourths, or at least two-thirds, of the annual income. Even the pitiful stipend he did allow was not placed at her own disposal, but was paid into the hands of his mother, who was authorised to subtract a sufficient sum to indemnify herself for affording board and lodging to her daughter-in-law, who was thus compelled to take up her abode with an old lady, whose temper was anything but amiable, and whose habits and opinions were in direct opposition to the inclinations of her involuntary inmate, seeing

that she breakfasted at eight o'clock precisely, objected to picnics, and had established a sort of curfew which she rigidly enforced, ringing a bell at half-past nine as a signal for the domestics to fasten up the doors, extinguish the fires, and betake themselves to their nocturnal repose. Such a mode of life was not pleasant to one of so lively a temperament as Mrs. Marsden. But this was not the worst of it; for, although the captain showed no signs of affection for his wife, he was as jealous as the fondest lover, and never failed, on the eve of a voyage, to impress his mother with the necessity of "keeping a watchful eye," and the old lady was only too happy in being furnished with an occupation so much to her taste. Under these circumstances, it could hardly be expected that Mrs. Marsden should feel particularly grieved at hearing that her lord had taken his departure from this world. It is even doubtful whether she gave a single tear to his me-

mory, nor could he in justice have laid claim to such a tribute ; for if a man would be lamented after his death, he should take the trouble to make himself agreeable while living.

with a jaunty kind of step, humming a tune, but on seeing the stranger she stopped short, and with the sweetest smile imaginable, said—

“I beg your pardon, I did not know any one was here. Sir Philip Blencoe, I believe?”

Mr. Lillybond felt gratified—Sir Philip was noted as being one of the handsomest men of his time, therefore it was a pleasant thing to be mistaken for him, and he replied with unusual urbanity—

“No, madam, my name is Lillybond, at your service.”

The widow curtsied a graceful acknowledgment of this self-introduction, took a book from the table, and, having intimated that her sole motive in visiting the library, at this particular moment, was to possess herself of the said volume, which, for aught she knew or cared, might be Hebrew or Chinese, she withdrew as hastily as she had

entered, and retired to her own apartment, where she indulged in a hearty laugh.

Flattery goes a long way with the "lords as well as ladies of the creation," and the homœopathic dose so adroitly administered, did not fail to produce its intended effect, for, as he was riding homewards, Mr. Lillybond said to himself—"A very pleasant, sensible woman, that. I wonder who she is? Nothing of the man-trap about her. If she is there to-night, I should like to have a little talk with her."

Now this soliloquy was remarkable, inasmuch as it was the first time in his life, since he had reached a prudent age, that Mr. Lillybond had given utterance to such a sentiment; and it was not less remarkable, that, on his arrival at his own domicile, his first act was to walk straight up to a looking-glass, and survey his own person therein, a species of weakness to which he was not given in a general way.

These were symptoms that ought to have

enlightened him as to his own perilous situation, but he was strangely blind to it, and the fact could only be thus accounted for. Eighteen months had elapsed since the death of Captain Marsden, and his widow had entirely discarded those outward symbols of her bereavement that might have proclaimed her disconsolate condition; so that, in point of appearance, there was nothing, at first sight, to create alarm in the mind of a single gentleman, or warn him to keep on the defensive. Mr. Lillybond would instantly have armed himself against a widow's cap, but he saw no danger in the delicate face and violet ribbons that had been presented to his sight, as they seemed to betoken a probability that there was a husband existent.

Upon what slender threads are hung the greatest events of our lives! A single word, the turn of a straw, the falling of a leaf, is all-sufficient to settle a man's destiny in this unaccountable world.

On the evening of that same day, about seven o'clock, Mr. Lillybond's man Thomas presented himself in the kitchen, with a face full of mirthful meaning, and astonished the feminine portion of the establishment by the following announcement—

“Master's going to have his hair curled.”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed the cook.

“You're a joking, Mr. Thomas,” said Sarah, the pretty housemaid; “without he's setting himself up to vie with some folks I could mention.”

And she glanced at the informant in a way that caused him to smirk, and adjust his collar with an air of complacency.

“It's a positive fact, I assure you,” he continued. “I am going this moment to fetch the hairdresser.”

So saying, he took down his hat from its peg, and departed on his unwonted mission.

“Now I hope there mayn't be somethink in it,” observed the cook, whose countenance was expressive of anything but plea-

sure, as the vision of a mistress prying into the secrets of the larder floated before her disturbed fancy. “*I shouldn’t stop.*”

“Well, I don’t think I should, either,” responded Sarah, “but it would depend.”

The *dependence* probably had reference to the above-mentioned Thomas; the preceding observation to certain perquisites that might, perchance, be stopped in the case supposed.

In the meantime, the fair widow had said not a word, even to Fanny, of the interview that had taken place in the library—a little episode in her history, which she thought it advisable to keep for the present to herself. The handsomely furnished drawing rooms of Mr. Seaton’s abode were brilliantly lighted, and tastefully arranged for the reception of the expected guests. Fanny was in high spirits, as well she might, for her lover, Charles Fairley, had arrived unexpectedly, that very day, from Frankfort, where he resided; and his object in coming

was to persuade the young lady to go back with him at the end of six weeks, as a bride. He had just been admitted as junior partner in a banking house in that city, an event he had been looking forward to for some time, as a preliminary to his marriage, such being the condition on which Mr. Seaton had promised to bestow on him the hand of the fair Fanny, with two thousand pounds as her dower.


"Let me see you well established, Charles," said that gentleman, "and I shall make no objection. You are both young enough to wait, and I am in no hurry to part with my daughter."

The young gentleman had been nearly two years in one of the principal houses at Frankfort, with the prospect of a partnership before him, his uncle being one of the firm, and it was in consequence of his absence from England, that the fact of his engagement to Fanny Seaton was not generally known. Now Mrs. Marsden had been

acquainted with him from the time when he used to play at marbles, and fly his kite in a field behind her house ; therefore, she was, of course, in the secret, and this knowledge had contributed, not a little, towards the amusement afforded her by the conversation she had overheard in the omnibus. Mr. Fairley was delighted to see her. He complimented her highly on her youthful and blooming appearance, and certainly she did look extremely well on this auspicious evening. Her dress was in the best taste imaginable ; she was herself in the best of humours ; her face was radiant as a sunbeam.

Indeed, she shone all smiles, and seemed to flatter
Mankind, with her bright eyes, for looking at her.

Even the handsome Sir Philip Blencoe was attracted ; but this might in some measure be owing to the fact that having heard she was a widow, and seeing that her attire was of a costly description, and that, moreover, she wore certain sparkling gems



which he mistook for diamonds, he concluded in his secret mind that her deceased husband had left her richly endowed—a qualification that would have suited him exactly ; consequently, he set about doing the agreeable with that happy confidence of success a handsome man is apt to entertain. But Sir Philip was not her game. His baronetcy weighed but, lightly in the scale against the five thousand per annum attributed to the cautious bachelor—an empty title possessed not the charm of a full pocket—and, to his infinite surprise, she received his assiduities with perfect indifference.

It was late when Mr. Lillybond entered the room, for he had devoted so much more time than usual to the business of the toilet, that he was all behindhand, and his carriage had waited at the door full three-quarters of an hour before he was ready to step into it. His eyes rested at once on the very agreeable, person who had put him on such good terms with himself in the morn-

ing, and, walking deliberately up to Mr. Seaton, he astonished that gentleman by asking—

“Pray, who is that lady in the green velvet dress?”

“She is Mrs. Marsden,” was the reply. “I will introduce you, if you like; but you must take care of yourself, for she is a widow, and a very charming one, too.”

Mr. Lillybond looked rather blank at this unexpected piece of information. Green velvet and glittering ornaments, with a profusion of blond and flowers, had not suggested to his mind the idea of widowhood, and he felt a little nervous as to the proposed introduction; however, he said to himself—

“It’s very odd if I can’t have a chat with anybody without its being thought particular.”

And he boldly accepted the offer. The lady bowed and smiled, but looked perfectly innocent of having ever set eyes on him

before; nor did she think proper to recognise his name, when mentioned by her host, as identical with that which the proprietor of it had himself announced to her in the early part of the day. But when Mr. Seaton, having duly performed his part, turned away, leaving his bachelor friend to profit by his good offices as he might, Mr. Lillybond said—

“I think you are the same lady I saw this morning?”

“Ah! yes—to be sure—in the library,” she replied, as though a sudden light had broken in upon her. “You are the gentleman I took for Sir Philip Blencoe.”

“Yes, madam. A curious mistake that, by the way—you see, now, we are not at all alike.”

“Pardon me, sir, I see no such thing. There is a great resemblance. Perhaps you are related?”

“Not in the least, ma’am.”

“Indeed! Well, I do see a likeness,

certainly; and it cannot be altogether fancy, for I never saw Sir Philip till this evening; yet, from the description I had heard of him, I quite thought you were he."

This was said with what may be called profound simplicity, although the terms are somewhat at variance, and it answered all the purpose intended, for the gentleman reflected with extreme satisfaction that no one would think of describing Sir Philip as any other than a very good-looking individual; and his eyes happening at that moment to glance towards a large pier-glass directly opposite, his mental observations were to this effect—

"Well, I don't know, now my hair is curled, there may be something that might strike a stranger."

The lady saw her advantage, and did not fail to pursue it, but she had better taste than to dwell upon the theme of personal attractions; so she branched off to the

higher qualities of the mind, and contrived to impress her auditor with a belief that she looked upon him as a person of very superior intellect.

Sir Philip Blencoe was at first very much annoyed at seeing a rival in the field, and made divers attempts to draw off the attention of the imaginary price ; but she slighted his endeavours, turned a deaf ear to his complimentary speeches, and flattered the more favoured bachelor by showing unmis-takeably that she preferred his conversation to that of the brilliant baronet. The latter, in fact, soon withdrew from her the light of his countenance, not exactly for the reason ascribed to his defection by his supposed rival, who imagined himself to be the sole cause, and enjoyed the idea amazingly, but because he had indirectly gained some information with regard to the lady's pecuniary affairs, which had materially altered his views.

Mrs. Marsden and her new friend con-

tinued to discourse on various subjects, till at length the conversation, somehow or other, turned upon matrimony, of which the lady expressed her unqualified disapprobation."

"You are a single man, Mr. Lillybond," she said; "and if I may offer you my opinion you will be wise to remain so. I myself experienced so little happiness during my married life, that not all the wealth of the Indies would tempt me to venture again."

This declaration set the gentleman perfectly at his ease. There was no intention, then, to spread a net for him—that was quite clear—and he congratulated himself upon being able to enjoy, without fear of danger, such very agreeable society.

"But, my dear madam," he replied, "it does not follow that because you were unfortunate in your first choice, that you should be so if you ventured on a second."

She shook her head and sighed.

"The risk is too great. A burnt child, you know, dreads the fire. I am afraid that most men are inclined to be tyrants, and a wife is so entirely under the husband's control——"

"Dear me!" exclaimed the astonished bachelor; "why I thought it was all the other way."

"I did not find it so, I assure you," said the widow, with a sigh; "not that I ever had any desire to rule, for I think it is the duty of every wife to study her husband's wishes in all things, and to look up to him as the superior power. The great bar to happiness in wedlock is, that men are too arbitrary and exacting."

"But when that is the case," said Mr. Lillybond, recalling to mind the observations he had made at various times on certain married couples of his acquaintance—"does not the lady sometimes assert her

independence, and insist upon having a will of her own?"

"It may be so," replied the lady, "but I never adopted that course myself: it only makes bad worse. No, no; a woman can only do as she likes so long as she preserves her freedom. If she marries, she ought to make up her mind to consider that her husband's will is law; and if she would be happy she must humour his caprices, study his comforts, and devote herself entirely to him; and I believe most women would delight in doing so, if men would but be moderately grateful."

Mr. Lillybond was struck with these sentiments. He began to think that matrimony might be endurable after all, and to ask himself whether it would not be the best thing he could do to place at the head of his household a charming person who would humour his caprices (that is, if he should happen to have any), study his

comforts, and not insist upon having a will of her own. A summons to a whist table put an end to this interesting *tête-a-tête* ; but the die was cast—Mr. Lillybond was a doomed man.

CHAPTER III.

It was about ten o'clock on a bright morning in the month of August; the birds were carolling their joyous songs; and the dew-drops would have been glittering on the verdant foliage, if the sun had not already dried them up, when a solitary wayfarer might be seen walking with slow and measured steps by the wall of Kensington Gardens. He was a man some sixty years of age; his ruddy countenance betokened exuberance of health, and there

was a twinkling of the eye, and a certain air of satisfaction pervading every feature, which betokened that some incident of a pleasant nature had disturbed the equanimity of his temperament, and produced an inclination to risibility. Ever and anon he stopped in his course, and cast a look behind, either in memory or anticipation, then walked on again more slowly than before. At length the distant sound of an approaching vehicle met his ear, and, as it came nearer and nearer, the loud tones of a not very harmonious human voice floated on the air, and the word "Bank!" soon became distinguishable. The pedestrian halted, apparently to await the coming of the carriage, which proved to be a Bayswater omnibus; and, at a signal made with his walking-stick, it drew up close to the spot where he stood, and in another minute he was comfortably seated therein. A familiar voice instantly greeted his ear with the customary salutation of the morning.

"Ah! good morning!" was the reply.
"I wanted to see you. Have you heard the news?"

"No: what news?"

"Why, you remember the bet we made about six weeks ago."

"Yes, to be sure; but you don't mean to say——"

"Yes, I do, though. You are fairly in, my good friend, for a rump steak and a bottle of claret. Read this."

And he took a newspaper out of his pocket, which he unfolded, and, pointing to the list of marriages, placed it in the hand of his *vis-à-vis*, who read with the utmost astonishment the following announcement.

Married, at St. Pancras Church, August 1st, Robert Lillybond, Esq., of Berkeley Street, to Mary Jane, widow of W. Marsden, Esq., late Captain in the service of the Hon. East India Company.—Also, at the same time, Charles Fairley, Esq., of Frankfort-sur-Maine, to Fanny, only daughter of Arthur Seaton, Esq., of Sloane-Square, Chelsea.

The sceptic who, only six weeks ago, had been so positive in his opinion that no such

event as the former of these two marriages would ever come to pass, read the paragraph twice over before he could believe the evidence of his own senses, but, having satisfied himself that it was no illusion, he burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, in which it may readily be supposed the winner of the wager joined with right good will. That same day, at six o'clock, the two worthy friends sat down to an excellent dinner, comprising many dainty dishes in addition to the forfeited rump steak, and drank the health of the bride in a bottle of the finest claret that ever found its way into the cellars of a London Club House.

THE END.



